

Transcript | How to Adapt Your Writing for Any Audience

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00:00:19.110 --> 00:00:29.719

Khalifa Idris: Hello, and welcome to this masterclass event on how to adapt your writing for any audience. My name is Khalifa Idris, and I'm a staff engineer here at Apolitical.

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00:00:30.060 --> 00:00:40.850

Khalifa Idris: Today, we're looking at how public servants can adapt their writing for different readers, from a leader who just wants the headline, to an audience who won't engage with anything that sounds like policy.

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00:00:41.290 --> 00:00:48.749

Khalifa Idris: We'll hear from two communicators who face this pressure daily, and leave with ways to write with more confidence.

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00:00:49.250 --> 00:01:02.139

Khalifa Idris: For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest online network for government, used by more than half a million public servants and policymakers across 170 countries.

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00:01:02.450 --> 00:01:08.099

Khalifa Idris: Apolitical is a strategic partner to government, helping them prepare their workforces for the future.

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00:01:08.340 --> 00:01:20.060

Khalifa Idris: We achieve this by upskilling through expert-led learning programs and peer communities, as well as by building innovative AI-powered tools designed for and with governments.

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00:01:20.150 --> 00:01:29.250

Khalifa Idris: It would be great to hear from and all... about all of you, too, so do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for.

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00:01:30.050 --> 00:01:35.469

Khalifa Idris: Now, I'm gonna go at a few bits of housekeeping, out of the way before we get into today's session.

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00:01:35.710 --> 00:01:42.109

Khalifa Idris: Firstly, I'll mention that this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself.

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00:01:42.320 --> 00:01:47.530

Khalifa Idris: We'll also be using the recording to generate event insights, including with AI-powered software.

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00:01:47.750 --> 00:02:00.309

Khalifa Idris: As the session is running on a Zoom webinar, we won't collect your video or audio data, but personal data you share in the chat may be captured. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the Apolitical homepage footer.

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00:02:00.310 --> 00:02:08.370

Khalifa Idris: Closed captions are available in your own language, and can be toggled on and off in your screen settings. My colleague will post the introductions in the chat now.

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00:02:09.770 --> 00:02:26.550

Khalifa Idris: And secondly, before we get started, I would love for you to... I would love to introduce you to the Writing Effectively in Government community on Apolitical. It's a space to ask the questions we don't always get time for at work or at these events, and to hone your skills with weekly writing exercises.

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00:02:27.020 --> 00:02:35.499

Khalifa Idris: This community is a great place to connect with and learn from your peers in the public sector. My colleague will also post the link to the community in the chat, so you can take a look.

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00:02:37.320 --> 00:02:38.140

Khalifa Idris: Awesome.

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00:02:39.090 --> 00:02:45.209

Khalifa Idris: Before we introduce our speakers, we are going to run a few quick polls just to get a sense of where you're coming from in today's session.

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00:02:45.450 --> 00:02:48.340

Khalifa Idris: Now, let's have a look at the first poll.

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00:02:48.880 --> 00:02:52.340

Khalifa Idris: Which audience do you find hardest to write for?

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00:02:52.560 --> 00:02:58.810

Khalifa Idris: So, you've got your options, ministers or senior leaders, colleagues outside my team.

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00:02:58.930 --> 00:03:03.739

Khalifa Idris: The public or non-specialist readers, technical or expert audiences.

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00:03:03.880 --> 00:03:05.550

Khalifa Idris: Or a mix of all of the above.

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00:03:06.920 --> 00:03:13.699

Khalifa Idris: Okay, taking a look at the results. So, looks like a mix of all of the above is...

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00:03:13.800 --> 00:03:17.599

Khalifa Idris: Ahead a little bit, followed by ministers or senior leaders.

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00:03:18.960 --> 00:03:19.760

Khalifa Idris: Okay.

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00:03:19.890 --> 00:03:21.619

Khalifa Idris: Still seeing some votes coming in.

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00:03:24.330 --> 00:03:32.880

Khalifa Idris: Looks like we have stability. So, a mix of all of the above, and ministers or senior leaders next, followed by technical or expert audiences.

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00:03:33.570 --> 00:03:34.380

Khalifa Idris: Awesome.

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00:03:34.760 --> 00:03:36.370

Khalifa Idris: Thank you for sharing that.

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00:03:36.800 --> 00:03:38.129

Khalifa Idris: And the second poll...

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00:03:38.740 --> 00:03:44.980

Khalifa Idris: Is, what do you usually spend the most time on when adapting your writing for different audiences?

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00:03:45.320 --> 00:03:57.500

Khalifa Idris: So, researching or understanding the audience needs, writing and editing content, getting input or approvals, formatting and presentation, and making sure the language and tone are right.

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00:03:58.630 --> 00:04:01.090

Khalifa Idris: Okay, I have my suspicions, but let's have a look.

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00:04:05.020 --> 00:04:09.050

Khalifa Idris: Okay, so making sure the tone and language are right is...

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00:04:09.250 --> 00:04:15.139

Khalifa Idris: Up there, yeah, I think that was what I was suspecting. Not because it's the winning poll.

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00:04:15.640 --> 00:04:19.360

Khalifa Idris: And followed by writing and editing the content.

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00:04:19.850 --> 00:04:21.360
Khalifa Idris: That makes sense.

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00:04:21.950 --> 00:04:23.650
Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome.

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00:04:24.390 --> 00:04:27.809
Khalifa Idris: Thank you very much for sharing those responses,

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00:04:28.110 --> 00:04:40.439
Khalifa Idris: Let's move on to speaker introductions. So, introducing our speakers, we're fortunate to have two brilliant guests, Michelle Saunders Parks and Lucas Hardonk, joining us today.

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00:04:40.740 --> 00:04:56.709
Khalifa Idris: Michelle Saunders Parks is Executive Director of Communications for the Tennessee Department of General Services, where she leads strategic communications across executive messaging, digital strategy, media relations, brand management, and public outreach.

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00:04:57.010 --> 00:05:16.160
Khalifa Idris: With more than 30 years of experience across government, nonprofits, publishing, music, and private industry, Michelle specializes in adapting messages for diverse audiences. She's spoken at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, and is a graduate of the Tennessee Government Executive Institute and LEAD Tennessee Alliance.

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00:05:16.160 --> 00:05:35.639
Khalifa Idris: Lukas Hardonk is a Senior Communications Advisor at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, where he leads public environment analysis to shape strategies that build trust and meet the diverse information needs of the public in Canada. With over a decade of experience in communications across the public.

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00:05:35.640 --> 00:05:47.600
Khalifa Idris: private and non-profit sectors, Lukas focuses on complex information accessible and turning data-driven insights into clear, impactful communications that foster meaningful dialogue and connection.

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00:05:47.600 --> 00:05:57.180

Khalifa Idris: You can read their full bios by visiting Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading over to the Speak section. Welcome both, it's very lovely to have you here.

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00:05:57.270 --> 00:05:58.630

Khalifa Idris: Awesome backgrounds.

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00:06:00.220 --> 00:06:03.730

Khalifa Idris: Okay, let's start with an icebreaker to kick things off.

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00:06:03.890 --> 00:06:10.689

Khalifa Idris: You'll each have 30 seconds to share your responses, and would love to hear the answers of everyone here today in the chat as well.

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00:06:11.570 --> 00:06:17.929

Khalifa Idris: To reflect today's topic, the icebreaker's in two parts. Firstly, if you have to describe your job to a 5-year-old.

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00:06:18.240 --> 00:06:20.330

Khalifa Idris: In one sentence, what would you say?

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00:06:20.620 --> 00:06:27.120

Khalifa Idris: And secondly, if you had to describe your job to a room of storytellers and creatives in one sentence, what would you say?

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00:06:28.990 --> 00:06:35.739

Khalifa Idris: So just think on your answers, and I will invite... I will also invite our audience to share their examples in the chat.

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00:06:35.910 --> 00:06:38.649

Khalifa Idris: Michelle, I'll go to you first.

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00:06:38.650 --> 00:06:39.570

Michelle Sanders Parks: Sure.

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00:06:40.070 --> 00:06:51.130

Michelle Sanders Parks: If I were to describe my job to a 5-year-old, I would try to keep it super simple. I help people understand important things so everyone knows what's happening.

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00:06:52.430 --> 00:06:56.020

Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome. And to Room of Storytellers and creatives?

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00:06:57.050 --> 00:07:08.099

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, a little, little more complicated here, but I help leaders earn trust by making the complicated feel clear, the important feel personal, and every message worth listening to.

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00:07:08.900 --> 00:07:12.779

Khalifa Idris: Okay, that's awesome. I think that's a great sentence.

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00:07:13.000 --> 00:07:18.120

Khalifa Idris: Okay, Lukas, if you had to describe your job to a 5-year-old, what would the one sentence be?

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00:07:18.120 --> 00:07:29.070

Lukas Hardonk: Sure, this was far more challenging than I care to admit. So I came up with, I listen to what lots of people are saying, then I help turn confusing things into easy things.

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00:07:30.110 --> 00:07:34.569

Khalifa Idris: Okay, that's good. And to a room of storytellers and creatives.

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00:07:34.960 --> 00:07:52.010

Lukas Hardonk: So, a bit more drawn out. I'm an archaeologist, a public discussion, digging through conversations, headlines, questions, and quiet signals to uncover the clues that help my organization tell stories people will trust... sorry, trust, remember, and carry with them.

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00:07:52.600 --> 00:07:54.640

Khalifa Idris: Okay, archaeologist, I like that.

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00:07:55.160 --> 00:07:56.880

Khalifa Idris: Awesome. Thank you both.

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00:07:57.280 --> 00:07:58.100

Khalifa Idris: Now...

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00:07:58.310 --> 00:08:08.420

Khalifa Idris: to get into the presentations. Michelle and Lukas have both prepared a masterclass presentation, drawing on their experiences with internal and public-facing communications.

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00:08:08.570 --> 00:08:17.539

Khalifa Idris: As always, we'll leave plenty of time for you in the audience to ask questions after, so please start thinking about those questions and posting them in the Q&A tab as we go along.

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00:08:17.910 --> 00:08:19.660

Khalifa Idris: Michelle, the floor is yours.

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00:08:20.860 --> 00:08:24.300

Michelle Sanders Parks: Wonderful Well, I appreciate you guys having me here.

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00:08:24.570 --> 00:08:28.309

Michelle Sanders Parks: And with that, I'm going to share my presentation with you.

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00:08:29.270 --> 00:08:30.939

Michelle Sanders Parks: Can I get a thumbs up?

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00:08:31.190 --> 00:08:34.059

Michelle Sanders Parks: If it's good to go? Okay, great, thank you.

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00:08:34.400 --> 00:08:50.739

Michelle Sanders Parks: Hello, everyone. I'm Michelle Parks. I'm the Executive Director of Communications for the Tennessee Department of General Services. My department is mostly operational, very little of what we do is public-facing. We support other state agencies through services such as procurement.

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00:08:50.740 --> 00:09:01.200

Michelle Sanders Parks: real estate and vehicle management. That means that I often communicate the same information to very different audiences, such as employees in my own department.

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00:09:01.200 --> 00:09:15.830

Michelle Sanders Parks: other state employees working at different departments, government leaders, sometimes the public, and the media. And that's what I want to talk about today. How can we take one message and adapt it so that it works for the people receiving it?

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00:09:19.610 --> 00:09:31.200

Michelle Sanders Parks: We often think adapting a message means just changing the words, but the most important decisions happen before we ever start writing. Before I write a single sentence, I try to answer 5 questions.

76

00:09:32.010 --> 00:09:33.620

Michelle Sanders Parks: Who is the audience?

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00:09:34.830 --> 00:09:36.549

Michelle Sanders Parks: What do they need to know?

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00:09:37.540 --> 00:09:39.410

Michelle Sanders Parks: What do I want them to do?

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00:09:40.260 --> 00:09:42.599

Michelle Sanders Parks: Where's the best place to reach them?

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00:09:43.720 --> 00:09:45.379

Michelle Sanders Parks: And how should I say it?

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00:09:46.420 --> 00:09:50.150

Michelle Sanders Parks: So let's start with the first question. Who is the audience?

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00:09:50.580 --> 00:10:09.179

Michelle Sanders Parks: Audience determines everything. Today, I'm going to use a real-life example. We recently had to close a large state office building in Nashville, Tennessee for fire alarm system testing. The tenants in this building include my department, state employees from several other departments.

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00:10:09.300 --> 00:10:14.690

Michelle Sanders Parks: Some public-facing services, and offices that regularly receive visitors.

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00:10:15.580 --> 00:10:18.279

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, what do you think these audiences care about?

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00:10:19.250 --> 00:10:23.680

Michelle Sanders Parks: Employees want to know, how does this impact my work? Am I coming to work?

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00:10:23.860 --> 00:10:28.329

Michelle Sanders Parks: Other state employees want to know, does this affect me or the services that I use?

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00:10:28.780 --> 00:10:36.240

Michelle Sanders Parks: Our leaders and partners want to know, is there anything that's expected of me? What do I need to communicate to my team? Excuse me.

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00:10:36.760 --> 00:10:41.019

Michelle Sanders Parks: The public wants to know, will this impact the government services that I receive?

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00:10:41.440 --> 00:10:48.030

Michelle Sanders Parks: Or can I still come to my appointment? And the media's going to want to know what is happening, and why is the building closing?

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00:10:49.030 --> 00:11:04.910

Michelle Sanders Parks: Notice that none of these audiences is asking the same question. We don't write differently because we like variety. We write differently because people need different information. So the first question isn't, what should I say? It's who needs to hear it from me.

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00:11:07.660 --> 00:11:11.090

Michelle Sanders Parks: So the second question, what do... what do they need to know?

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00:11:11.800 --> 00:11:32.460

Michelle Sanders Parks: Once I know who the audience is, I can ask what each group actually needs from me. For example, employees are going to need operational information. Leaders are going to need information that they can act on or share. And the public's going to want to know whether services are available, and the media's going to need to know context, timing, and if there's an official response.

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00:11:32.760 --> 00:11:38.720

Michelle Sanders Parks: So it's the same event, and same facts, but not everybody needs the same facts.

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00:11:40.260 --> 00:11:43.599

Michelle Sanders Parks: So the next question, what do I want them to do?

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00:11:43.930 --> 00:11:49.410

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, information alone does not create impact. Action does. For example.

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00:11:49.730 --> 00:11:52.239

Michelle Sanders Parks: I want employees to work remotely.

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00:11:53.090 --> 00:11:55.859

Michelle Sanders Parks: I want leaders to inform their teams.

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00:11:56.640 --> 00:12:03.100

Michelle Sanders Parks: I want the public to know that they should use another service channel, or reschedule any of their appointments.

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00:12:03.330 --> 00:12:06.949

Michelle Sanders Parks: And I want to make sure that the media shares accurate information.

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00:12:08.010 --> 00:12:15.620

Michelle Sanders Parks: If I cannot tell you what I want the audience to do after reading the message, I'm probably not ready to write it yet.

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00:12:18.790 --> 00:12:25.899

Michelle Sanders Parks: So instead of asking, where should I post this? Ask the question, where will this audience actually see it?

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00:12:26.820 --> 00:12:37.250

Michelle Sanders Parks: That small change in the question moves us from publishing content to developing a communication strategy. So here are some of the channels that I have available to me.

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00:12:37.250 --> 00:12:52.929

Michelle Sanders Parks: I can use email, I can use our intranet, our internal website. We use Teams. I know some people may have Slack or some comparable-type channel. We have an external website, and then there's several different social media platforms.

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00:12:52.930 --> 00:13:03.900

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, as you develop your communication strategies, these are some of the things that you should be thinking about in terms of the channels that you have access to, and where you can best reach your audiences.

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00:13:05.610 --> 00:13:08.950

Michelle Sanders Parks: And then the last question, how should I say it?

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00:13:09.180 --> 00:13:15.550

Michelle Sanders Parks: Notice we haven't written a single sentence yet. We have spent our entire time making decisions.

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00:13:16.060 --> 00:13:17.760

Michelle Sanders Parks: And that's intentional.

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00:13:17.860 --> 00:13:26.549

Michelle Sanders Parks: Once I know the audience, what they need, what I want them to do, and where will I reach them, the writing becomes much easier.

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00:13:27.300 --> 00:13:40.960

Michelle Sanders Parks: The facts don't change. What changes is the framing, the level of detail, the call to action, the structure, and sometimes the language. We aren't simply repurposing content, we're adapting it.

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00:13:40.960 --> 00:13:53.750

Michelle Sanders Parks: So we want to take some time to think about the tone, the structure, and the language we use. And note how these vary according to the audience I'm trying to reach. Again, it's the same facts.

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00:13:53.750 --> 00:14:08.759

Michelle Sanders Parks: the same event, but different information. In my example here, I've got several audiences. I have employees, other state employees working for different agencies, leaders and partners, the public, and the media.

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00:14:09.270 --> 00:14:30.079

Michelle Sanders Parks: For our example today, I want to highlight the public audience. Since it isn't an audience I contract regularly, I felt it was really important to use some reassuring language to focus on plain language, and if your government is anything like mine, we love our acronyms, or what I like to call alphabet soup.

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00:14:30.090 --> 00:14:47.290

Michelle Sanders Parks: And the public isn't going to be familiar with those acronyms, so it's essential that I adapted my writing for them and avoid trying to use any types of acronyms. But if you'll notice at this chart, there are different tones and different ways of structuring the information

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00:14:47.290 --> 00:14:52.850

Michelle Sanders Parks: that I focused on to try to reach the audiences I wanted to communicate with.

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00:14:54.690 --> 00:15:11.850

Michelle Sanders Parks: So this is the result. We have one event with different versions. The facts are going to be consistent across every version, but here's what changes. The amount of detail, what comes first, the call to action, and the formatting. That's adaptation.

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00:15:11.850 --> 00:15:23.899

Michelle Sanders Parks: For example, the employee message contained more information, very specifics about the building being closed, how they could pick up their mail, which for many of our departments is very time-sensitive.

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00:15:23.900 --> 00:15:39.580

Michelle Sanders Parks: And then, with our leaders, they needed to be able to share information with their teams. Meanwhile, the public message was very simple and short, very basic details about the closure and the reopening. And now I want to show you what this looks like in practice.

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00:15:40.410 --> 00:15:52.659

Michelle Sanders Parks: So I'm going to start with a few different audiences, but I want to point out, again, this was one closure, a temporary closure of a building with multiple audiences who all had very different communication needs.

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00:15:52.920 --> 00:16:17.810

Michelle Sanders Parks: For our employees and other state employees, we needed operational details, such as when the building would close, how could they pick up their mail, when would it reopen, and contact questions, or who to contact with questions, I'm sorry. So for that particular audience, I used a couple of different channels. I used Microsoft Teams, and developed a post, which you can see on the far left.

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00:16:18.030 --> 00:16:33.729

Michelle Sanders Parks: We sent this out twice leading up to the closure, and then the example there in the middle was a post that went on our intranet, which is where every state employee has access. These channels allowed me to reach all state employees.

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00:16:34.180 --> 00:16:51.569

Michelle Sanders Parks: And then for our leaders and partners, I created an email to explain to them that I needed their help in sharing a message, and I provided them with the message that they could share with their audiences. And then I sent a very similar email to our own staff with very specific details.

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00:16:52.100 --> 00:17:15.700

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, for some of my other audiences, for the public, the most important information was when was the building going to be closed, and when would it reopen? And so I used social media posts to share this information, and you can notice it's very short and quick. I also advised our tenants in the building to share their messages with their guests and customers, because that was one audience that I didn't have a direct connection to.

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00:17:15.920 --> 00:17:28.219

Michelle Sanders Parks: And for the media, we needed an official explanation, a timeline, and service impact, and our posted... I posted our announcement on our newswire website, which is where local media picks up stories.

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00:17:28.420 --> 00:17:30.850

Michelle Sanders Parks: So these are just some of the examples.

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00:17:33.050 --> 00:17:37.829

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, if you remember one thing from today, I hope it is these five questions.

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00:17:38.240 --> 00:17:39.820

Michelle Sanders Parks: Who is the audience?

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00:17:40.000 --> 00:17:41.679

Michelle Sanders Parks: What do they need to know?

128

00:17:41.850 --> 00:17:43.840

Michelle Sanders Parks: What do I want them to do?

129

00:17:43.940 --> 00:17:47.840

Michelle Sanders Parks: Where is the best place to reach them, and how should I say it?

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00:17:48.410 --> 00:17:50.670

Michelle Sanders Parks: Answer those questions first.

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00:17:51.350 --> 00:17:53.310

Michelle Sanders Parks: And then write with purpose.

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00:17:54.770 --> 00:18:06.679

Michelle Sanders Parks: And in closing, I'll leave you with this. Great writing doesn't begin with words. It begins with understanding people. When we meet people where they... where they are, our words can take them where we need them to go.

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00:18:07.820 --> 00:18:08.750

Michelle Sanders Parks: Thank you.

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00:18:10.470 --> 00:18:11.390

Khalifa Idris: Awesome.

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00:18:11.580 --> 00:18:22.769

Khalifa Idris: Thank you very much, Michelle, that was super helpful. I think I was, as you were speaking about intent of messaging, I was thinking about, you know, sometimes how,

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00:18:22.980 --> 00:18:36.040

Khalifa Idris: things, leak to the media, and so communication falls apart because the organization hasn't had the opportunity to actually, you know, provide the message forward. So, I think that's... that's... that's very interesting.

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00:18:36.880 --> 00:18:37.900

Khalifa Idris: Excellent.

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00:18:37.960 --> 00:18:38.989

Michelle Sanders Parks: Thank you.

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00:18:39.620 --> 00:18:53.269

Khalifa Idris: Lukas, I'll hand over to you in a second. I just want to make sure, I take a moment to encourage everyone to get their questions submitted in time for Q&A. We've got two experts here with us, so please don't hold back. There's no such thing as a bad question.

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00:18:53.670 --> 00:18:55.309

Khalifa Idris: Lukas, over to you.

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00:19:02.750 --> 00:19:06.389

Lukas Hardonk: Okay, thank you. I'm just getting set here.

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00:19:06.840 --> 00:19:13.770

Lukas Hardonk: Okay, so, first of all, fantastic presentation, Michelle. If I can...

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00:19:14.040 --> 00:19:33.030

Lukas Hardonk: be half as good as that, then I'll have hit my mark for, for today. Thank you for the introduction, Khalifa. Thank you to Apolitical for having me back today. I'm thrilled to... to be back again for this, important discussion. So, yeah, my name is Lukas. I work at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, or you'll hear me say CNSC for short.

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00:19:33.030 --> 00:19:43.960

Lukas Hardonk: And we regulate nuclear energy in Canada and nuclear materials in Canada, so you can think of, of course, nuclear power plants, but also, you know, applications of radiation within hospitals, for example.

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00:19:44.740 --> 00:19:49.859

Lukas Hardonk: So our work involves a lot of heavy, sort of, technical speak that many folks

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00:19:49.860 --> 00:20:08.180

Lukas Hardonk: often including myself, have trouble understanding. Unfortunately for many people, when they think of nuclear power, the first thing that comes to mind is usually either Homer Simpson sitting at his desk, or the latest documentary they watched on Chernobyl, Fukushima, Three Mile Island, any, you know, significant nuclear event in history.

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00:20:08.180 --> 00:20:16.509

Lukas Hardonk: So that is to say that nuclear matters are often largely very complex, unfamiliar, and quite frankly, you know, scary to much of the general public.

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00:20:16.510 --> 00:20:34.190

Lukas Hardonk: This is starting to change now that the sector is seeing a bit of a resurgence around the world, but still, our challenge is making this information accessible and

understandable so that people can make informed decisions while also rejecting misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, which you'll hear me talk about a little bit today.

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00:20:34.190 --> 00:20:57.109

Lukas Hardonk: So ultimately, in my role, my job is to collect and apply insights, scan through public environment analysis, to help inform how we adapt our messaging on social media, but also other channels, both online and offline, specifically in an external communications perspective, to really help our audiences understand, you know, as I said, what's pretty generally complex and technical subjects.

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00:20:57.200 --> 00:21:08.769

Lukas Hardonk: So there's a number of considerations I'll walk through to give you a sense about how we go about this, and I'm going to talk today in this, somewhat hypothetical scenario. So in 2024,

151

00:21:08.770 --> 00:21:21.849

Lukas Hardonk: the CNSC authorized the construction of a radioactive waste disposal facility where low-level radioactive waste will be stored. So you can think of things like, the gloves worn by workers at nuclear facilities across Canada.

152

00:21:21.950 --> 00:21:38.640

Lukas Hardonk: In this scenario, there's disinformation going around that radioactive waste is being dumped into the nearby Ottawa River, which, for those of you outside of Ottawa, is a significant source of drinking water in the region, and it's also actively used for fishing, recreation, and other things by local residents and tourists.

153

00:21:38.920 --> 00:21:51.309

Lukas Hardonk: In reality, of course, though, nothing... there's no radioactive materials being dumped into the river. This facility is highly engineered, it's been subject to intense, years-long regulatory scrutiny.

154

00:21:51.670 --> 00:22:07.050

Lukas Hardonk: But as you can imagine, of course, this sort of topic generates a lot of strong emotions among the public. People feel a direct threat to their safety and the environment, and thus, you know, we're not just correcting false information, but we're also responding to fear and trust gaps among the public as well.

155

00:22:07.580 --> 00:22:15.049

Lukas Hardonk: So then, you know, how do we actually draft a message that responds to this misinformation, this disinformation, and the emotions that it's causing?

156

00:22:15.470 --> 00:22:28.420

Lukas Hardonk: So first thing we need to do, of course, is clearly identify who exactly we're trying to reach. You know, one of the most common errors I've seen throughout my career is that organizations often try to communicate with everyone at once.

157

00:22:28.420 --> 00:22:34.639

Lukas Hardonk: Which is one reason why communications can sometimes fall flat or seem to lack, value for the audience.

158

00:22:34.640 --> 00:22:54.090

Lukas Hardonk: So therefore, we need to be very specific, in who we're trying to reach. So our audiences, in this case, aren't the general public, it's not all Canadians, it's not all people who live in the Ottawa Valley, for example. We have to get much more specific. So, some guiding questions you see there on the screen, who do I need to reach and why? Who does social media allow me to reach?

159

00:22:54.090 --> 00:23:06.469

Lukas Hardonk: key consideration here, of course, being that not everyone uses social media, and not everyone who does will use it equally. But also, you know, are there some... are some audiences higher priority than others?

160

00:23:06.580 --> 00:23:22.220

Lukas Hardonk: So based on the answers to these questions, as well as those scenario-specific ones that you see on the screen, we know in this case our audience is our local community members, because they're the ones who are most impacted by and most vulnerable to the disinformation and misinformation that's going around.

161

00:23:22.220 --> 00:23:26.760

Lukas Hardonk: Indigenous nations and communities are a significant interest holder within the region that

162

00:23:26.760 --> 00:23:38.750

Lukas Hardonk: That have unique rights that need to be respected. Non-governmental organizations, in some cases, they're the ones spreading the disinformation and misinformation, and in other cases, they can help us refute and push back against it.

163

00:23:38.750 --> 00:23:57.000

Lukas Hardonk: And then a bit more of a secondary audience, but no less relevant being local media. They, especially in these, local regions, such as where this facility is being constructed, they often have significant influence, and can therefore amplify our messaging even further within those communities.

164

00:23:57.000 --> 00:24:00.409

Lukas Hardonk: So we want to be able to leverage them, to the extent possible.

165

00:24:00.900 --> 00:24:08.539

Lukas Hardonk: So once we know who we're trying to communicate with, we can then start to determine which channels we're going to use to communicate.

166

00:24:08.560 --> 00:24:23.009

Lukas Hardonk: you know, ultimately, we can try and adapt our writing as much as we want, but if, you know, if we're not sharing in the right place, of course, then it won't get through to our audience. So two main considerations here being, we have to communicate on the channels that our audiences actually use, and in this case.

167

00:24:23.010 --> 00:24:31.469

Lukas Hardonk: Where the misinformation and the disinformation is present. And secondly, the channels themselves are highly unique, so we have to adjust our messaging accordingly.

168

00:24:32.030 --> 00:24:38.300

Lukas Hardonk: So there's a number of ways that, that we can find out which channels various audiences use.

169

00:24:38.300 --> 00:24:52.540

Lukas Hardonk: For example, the platforms themselves, Facebook, Instagram, X, Reddit, and so forth, will provide you varying levels of data, some better than others, depending on the platform. But you can also review credible third-party sources, such as academic research.

170

00:24:52.540 --> 00:24:56.519

Lukas Hardonk: Government public opinion research, if that's available to you.

171

00:24:56.520 --> 00:25:08.770

Lukas Hardonk: Also, you know, Meltwater, Hootsuite, if you are dealing with social media, social media examiners, social media today, these are all fantastic resources, for information and data related to channels.

172

00:25:08.860 --> 00:25:26.349

Lukas Hardonk: But also, you know, your audiences will tell you if you ask them directly if public opinion research is available to you, but also, through, you know, you'll be able to get a sense of the channels they use and how they use them through their interactions and comments, direct messages, and so forth.

173

00:25:26.860 --> 00:25:34.599

Lukas Hardonk: So in this case, we've nailed down that our two platforms are Facebook and X that we're focusing on here.

174

00:25:37.390 --> 00:26:02.389

Lukas Hardonk: So, the next step is, you know, figuring out what we're trying to do. And the question is quite simple. What do we want our message to do? Ultimately, setting an objective serves two purposes. One, it determines... it helps to determine the format of our writing, and secondly, it allows you to effectively measure the performance of your message after you've published it, which, of course, in itself will help you unlock further insights that can help you refine your messaging

175

00:26:02.390 --> 00:26:05.629

Lukas Hardonk: For this audience, but also others in the future.

176

00:26:05.640 --> 00:26:19.139

Lukas Hardonk: So we have 3 preset, social media objectives outlined in our departmental social media strategy, and they're, intended to align largely with our organizational mandate.

177

00:26:19.470 --> 00:26:38.320

Lukas Hardonk: So you see them on the screen here, inform, educate, and engage. At a high level, inform, when we're applying this objective to a social media post, we simply want to make

the audience aware of something. This is usually the most common objective. The example here would be, you know, nuclear waste will be safely stored in a near-surface disposal facility.

178

00:26:38.340 --> 00:26:53.270

Lukas Hardonk: With Educate, we're getting much more detailed, much more specific, and we're trying to teach the audience about a subject. So, the example here, special liner... special aligners and covers hold and separate the waste to keep harmful materials out of the river.

179

00:26:53.280 --> 00:27:04.650

Lukas Hardonk: And then thirdly, there's engage. So this is when we want the audience to take a specific action, such as registering for an event, or in this case, submitting your feedback on how we regulate nuclear waste.

180

00:27:04.950 --> 00:27:28.630

Lukas Hardonk: What I want to emphasize here is that the objective of your message should, of course, be tied to your communications objective. So, for example, if our comms objective is to prevent the spread of mis- and disinformation related to the safety of the waste facility, then the objective of our message is to educate our audiences on what makes a facility safe, not just to say that it's safe. Because, of course, if we just say.

181

00:27:28.630 --> 00:27:33.990

Lukas Hardonk: Hey, don't worry, we're regulating this, it's safe, you know, then...

182

00:27:34.340 --> 00:27:48.029

Lukas Hardonk: you can imagine, sort of, how that goes over with the audience. So we need to... we need to prove what makes it safe, the research that's gone into it, and why the... why the public can be confident that this facility is safe, and ultimately that nothing is getting into the river.

183

00:27:50.110 --> 00:28:00.089

Lukas Hardonk: So, with that in mind, you know, before we can be sources of information for our audiences, we need to also see our audiences as sources of information for us.

184

00:28:00.230 --> 00:28:15.690

Lukas Hardonk: I think I might have mentioned earlier, your audiences, you know, if you ask them directly, your audiences will tell you everything that you need to know, primarily what

information they need and how they want to receive that information before you actually start drafting the message.

185

00:28:16.090 --> 00:28:19.149

Lukas Hardonk: Of course, as long as you... as long as you're willing to do the research.

186

00:28:19.430 --> 00:28:33.679

Lukas Hardonk: A couple key focus questions here, just to sort of pare it down from what you see on screen. How does your audience prefer to receive information, and what nuances exist in your audience's language? And I'll touch on that in a few seconds here.

187

00:28:33.980 --> 00:28:43.770

Lukas Hardonk: How do you actually go about conducting that research? Again, the platforms provide varying levels of data, third-party resources are available, but most importantly, you know.

188

00:28:43.810 --> 00:29:06.200

Lukas Hardonk: get out there within your organization, speak to teams across your organization, and you'll be amazed by the number of touchpoints the organization has with the public that you may not even be aware of, and therefore the amount of data and insights available to you that you can apply when you're trying to reach, different, different corners of the public. This is one of the biggest lessons learned in my current role, even though I work in communications.

189

00:29:06.200 --> 00:29:13.280

Lukas Hardonk: I have a good general awareness of what goes on, and a very solid awareness of our... especially our online audiences.

190

00:29:13.280 --> 00:29:23.330

Lukas Hardonk: It was when I started connecting more with people across my organization that I was able to get a lot more information on those audiences that we can then apply to tailoring our messaging to them.

191

00:29:23.890 --> 00:29:25.770

Lukas Hardonk: Here...

192

00:29:25.930 --> 00:29:50.690

Lukas Hardonk: If your organization has access to tools like Meltwater, Cision, Hootsuite, these are fantastic resources for being able to access hard data in learning about your audiences. The example that you see here in the top right is a screenshot that I pulled from Meltwater, where it's comparing, from January to the end of July this year, the use of nuclear waste versus radioactive waste on social media.

193

00:29:50.740 --> 00:30:02.340

Lukas Hardonk: And as you can see, the term nuclear waste is far and away the more popular term. This is just sort of that 7-month span, but this is consistent over an even longer period of time.

194

00:30:02.340 --> 00:30:12.340

Lukas Hardonk: So what this tells us is that people are calling it nuclear waste, or referring to it as nuclear waste, they're searching for it. If you go on Google Trends, you'll see the same, almost the exact same graph.

195

00:30:12.340 --> 00:30:33.280

Lukas Hardonk: So for us, that means that we, you know, when we can, we need to be using the term nuclear waste, because this is what's going to help our audience find that information. That's what they're searching for. And because it's the language they're using, it's going to be much more relatable and stand out much more to them than if we're talking about radioactive waste, which can sound much more technical,

196

00:30:33.280 --> 00:30:37.500

Lukas Hardonk: And, you know, not as... not as direct, maybe, as nuclear waste.

197

00:30:39.700 --> 00:30:53.899

Lukas Hardonk: So now that we've identified our audiences and channels, set our objectives, gained some more, you know, context through additional research, we can start to build out a message. And I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna read verbatim, you know, what's on screen here, but I will kind of walk through

198

00:30:53.900 --> 00:30:59.949

Lukas Hardonk: why this works. So one, as I was just mentioning, we speak our audience's language,

199

00:30:59.990 --> 00:31:12.599

Lukas Hardonk: there's much more to this, but here, the example being, you know, the use of nuclear waste instead of radioactive waste. Also, we touch on our audience's concerns, so one thing I haven't mentioned yet in this presentation is that,

200

00:31:12.890 --> 00:31:18.060

Lukas Hardonk: Some... there's been concerns previously about, perceived...

201

00:31:18.180 --> 00:31:29.229

Lukas Hardonk: danger that, you know, if it rains, then that could wash radioactive contaminants into the nearby river. So here we address that concern, very briefly.

202

00:31:29.230 --> 00:31:44.359

Lukas Hardonk: The message is also written for our primary audiences first, while media can also pick short snippets or sentences out of this text that can be directly inserted, then, into a newscast or an article, so they can take this message and amplify it further within that local community.

203

00:31:45.060 --> 00:31:55.730

Lukas Hardonk: And also, it provides a very plain language explanation of a very technical subject, which is also something I don't think I quite touched on much within this presentation, is the importance of plain language

204

00:31:55.730 --> 00:32:09.610

Lukas Hardonk: And making sure that, you know, your audience can understand by, you know, cutting out buzzwords, cutting out fluff, cutting out that technical, those technical terms, and focusing on much more, plain language, speak.

205

00:32:10.200 --> 00:32:23.330

Lukas Hardonk: This character count obviously doesn't work for one of our platforms, XSE, there you have a couple options. You can either break it into a thread with two, posts, or the better option would usually be to shorten this even further.

206

00:32:23.420 --> 00:32:42.989

Lukas Hardonk: Also, what I want to mention here, you can see a link there in the bottom right to a video I encourage you to check out afterwards. We were... we can take this text and adapt it even further, so that way, it can be used for audiences who prefer visual communication, or on platforms that are much more optimized for video. So, obviously, YouTube comes to mind.

207

00:32:44.940 --> 00:33:03.280

Lukas Hardonk: So, with that, I'll leave you with this quote. Communication is not about speaking what we think, but it's about ensuring what others... sorry, ensuring others hear what we mean. I think this really encapsulates what comms is all about, you know, because if our message is going to resonate, then it has to be developed in a way that makes sense to our audiences.

208

00:33:03.810 --> 00:33:20.439

Lukas Hardonk: So, I just want to throw it out there. I'm curious, always interested to hear what people think. You know, what are your strategies for communicating complex information? I know a lot of us work in organizations where that information is very technical and difficult to cut through, you know, to cut through the noise and communicate.

209

00:33:20.440 --> 00:33:31.850

Lukas Hardonk: With external audiences. Did any of this resonate with you? What are some other, you know, strategies, that you apply? Feel free, please, to jump in the chat. Looking forward to reviewing those.

210

00:33:31.950 --> 00:33:42.940

Lukas Hardonk: But in the meantime, I want to thank all of you for joining, today. Thank you again to Apolitical for having me. Don't hesitate, please, to connect with me on LinkedIn. You see the URL there on the screen, just my name.

211

00:33:43.020 --> 00:33:55.229

Lukas Hardonk: In the meantime, in the words of my director, Carly Dipka, I want to, say I'm happy to take any easy questions, so please pop them in the chat, and I'll do my best. Thanks.

212

00:33:56.050 --> 00:34:01.219

Khalifa Idris: Awesome. Thank you very much, Lukas. And yeah, I appreciate the Simon Sinek quote there.

213

00:34:01.240 --> 00:34:11.949

Khalifa Idris: I actually have a few questions myself, but I won't hijack the Q&A session. I think it's just interesting, what you were talking about, you know, when you engage.

214

00:34:11.960 --> 00:34:29.560

Khalifa Idris: provide a way for the audience to engage. With misinformation or disinformation, sometimes the signals are often louder with, you know, the news cycle. So, you know, getting your message out there might, you know, get drowned. So, you know, I'm curious to know how you would kind of combat that, but like I said.

215

00:34:29.679 --> 00:34:31.870

Khalifa Idris: I won't overtake the Q&A.

216

00:34:32.670 --> 00:34:48.309

Khalifa Idris: Speaking of, remember to keep dropping any questions you have for our speakers in the Zoom Q&A, and before we dive into your questions, I want to let you know that we've also sourced a great follow-on resource to today's topic that we think you'll find useful.

217

00:34:48.429 --> 00:34:56.589

Khalifa Idris: This article pulls together the best writing advice ever shared by members of our Writing Effectively in Government community, which you can be a part of.

218

00:34:57.310 --> 00:35:14.169

Khalifa Idris: To receive your link to the article, go to the Writing Effectively in Government community after the event, and leave a comment on the post pinned at the very top of the page. We'll send you the resource by email after the event. My colleague has also posted a link to that thread in the chat, so definitely do take a look at that.

219

00:35:14.840 --> 00:35:23.410

Khalifa Idris: Awesome. So, on to the QA... Q&A. We received some great questions from you all, so I will start with...

220

00:35:23.530 --> 00:35:27.379

Khalifa Idris: Michelle, for leaders and staff.

221

00:35:27.680 --> 00:35:35.049

Khalifa Idris: How can you make sure that they have read the information? In health, people are busy and don't always have access to emails.

222

00:35:36.550 --> 00:35:56.370

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, that's a great question, and I don't think we can ever, as communicators, guarantee that people will read our messages. What we can do is build confidence that we're giving people a reasonable opportunity to receive it, which, again, means knowing your audience and using the channels that they trust and pay attention to.

223

00:35:56.570 --> 00:36:12.269

Michelle Sanders Parks: And then you repeat. You know, I've found in my experience, that the more you remind people, it might seem like overkill on your own part, but that's because we live with the message, we're familiar with it, and it's, you know.

224

00:36:13.560 --> 00:36:33.619

Michelle Sanders Parks: it sits with us very well, whereas your audience, this is new information for them. So I think the best thing to ask yourself is, did I use the right channels? Did I do it with enough frequency and consistency? And did I give the audience multiple opportunities to see, understand, and act on the message? You know, we can't force people.

225

00:36:33.620 --> 00:36:36.410

Michelle Sanders Parks: But you can provide them with lots of opportunities.

226

00:36:37.970 --> 00:36:45.459

Khalifa Idris: Yeah, I think that makes sense, and I imagine in health, there's a lot going on, so resurfacing the message, I think, is a good strategy.

227

00:36:46.450 --> 00:36:57.450

Khalifa Idris: Excellent. Thank you, Michelle. I'll go over to you, Lukas. So this question is, how can you gather feedback on how successful or unsuccessful your communications are?

228

00:37:00.520 --> 00:37:20.289

Lukas Hardonk: Yeah, so it's, I guess, both qualitative and quantitative. So the first, the first important part is setting your objective. So on social media, for example, if you, you know, set your objective and it's, engaged, then you're gonna be, you know, that objective is tied direct, directly to specific KPIs.

229

00:37:20.290 --> 00:37:27.389

Lukas Hardonk: So, for engage, objectives, the KPIs are typically video views or clicks, click-through rate.

230

00:37:27.390 --> 00:37:33.010

Lukas Hardonk: Because you're trying to assess, did the audience actually take the action that you want them to take?

231

00:37:34.690 --> 00:37:42.890

Lukas Hardonk: whether or not, you know, once you're looking at your KPI, determining whether or not that number is actually good or not should be compared against a baseline that you've established.

232

00:37:42.890 --> 00:38:05.249

Lukas Hardonk: based on your previous communication. So you can go back and, you know, if you've been, you know, tagging each of your messages or applying an objective to each of your messages, then you'll be able to establish a baseline. What is your average click-through rate, for example? Then you can take the click-through rate of your... the message you're trying to assess, and compare that to your baseline. Qualitatively.

233

00:38:05.600 --> 00:38:16.409

Lukas Hardonk: is a bit more difficult. It requires a lot more manual, I guess, research, public environment analysis in terms of scanning social media conversations, scanning comments.

234

00:38:16.410 --> 00:38:30.839

Lukas Hardonk: Determining sentiment. There's tools that can help with this, some online free tools, some paid tools. Our department uses Meltwater, which is fantastic for tracking trends, tracking conversation spikes.

235

00:38:30.840 --> 00:38:36.280

Lukas Hardonk: tracking sentiment, especially around specific topics. So ultimately, it depends whether, you know.

236

00:38:36.280 --> 00:38:46.540

Lukas Hardonk: if first you've applied an objective to your message. If you haven't, then it becomes a bit, it becomes a bit less clear, because there's nothing that you're really assessing against, but

237

00:38:46.540 --> 00:38:57.020

Lukas Hardonk: With a mixture of, sort of, you know, quantitative metrics and qualitative research, you can generally get a sense of whether or not your message is getting through, but also how people are actually reacting to it.

238

00:38:58.620 --> 00:39:15.309

Khalifa Idris: Yeah, that makes sense. But I imagine in social media, because, you know, oftentimes things move quickly there, it's kind of difficult to assess, you know, if someone engaged with it, or if they read it, but they actually, you know, took in the information there.

239

00:39:16.280 --> 00:39:18.110

Khalifa Idris: Okay Awesome.

240

00:39:18.250 --> 00:39:20.530

Khalifa Idris: Back to you, Michelle.

241

00:39:20.840 --> 00:39:34.660

Khalifa Idris: So this question is, thank you for the presentation. How would you recommend presenting challenging or unfavorable decisions to senior officials who may have limited time to review all of the supporting information in detail?

242

00:39:36.830 --> 00:39:55.529

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, I work directly for a commissioner who is, like, the equivalent of, like, a CEO of a company. So, in my messages to him, I'm very specific, I'm very concise, I'm very direct. You know, there's no need to sugarcoat it. I think it's very important that you get to the point immediately.

243

00:39:55.530 --> 00:40:01.340

Michelle Sanders Parks: And that, to me, shows that I value his time. I'm not gonna bury the lead, I'm gonna

244

00:40:01.340 --> 00:40:04.469

Michelle Sanders Parks: stated up front, and,

245

00:40:04.630 --> 00:40:28.650

Michelle Sanders Parks: you know, I think it's important that leaders have the ability to respond and act on things quickly, so I think the sooner you communicate that information, the better. If

you're in person, it's great to be able to do that, but in my world, a lot of us work remotely, so we're not always in the same room, so depending on the situation, it might be a phone call, it might be a Teams message, or it might be an email.

246

00:40:28.790 --> 00:40:45.629

Michelle Sanders Parks: I don't know how it works in the rest of the world, but, in Tennessee, we are subject to public records, which means anything you put in writing and email is subject to being requested as a public records request. So...

247

00:40:45.670 --> 00:40:50.799

Michelle Sanders Parks: In many cases, a very sensitive nature, a phone call is going to be the best path for me.

248

00:40:52.200 --> 00:40:56.230

Khalifa Idris: Okay, fun fact about Tennessee. Keep that in mind.

249

00:40:56.230 --> 00:41:09.310

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, I think that's true across a lot of the United States. I don't know how it is in other countries, but in Tennessee, it's definitely a big deal about public records, so we have to be very conscientious of what we say in writing.

250

00:41:10.120 --> 00:41:16.549

Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome, that's good to know. And actually, staying on topic, there's a follow-up question, slightly related.

251

00:41:16.900 --> 00:41:26.989

Khalifa Idris: What do you think of the argument that plain language is only for comms with the general public, and that, conversely, jargon is a way to show expertise when speaking with expert audiences?

252

00:41:28.470 --> 00:41:43.280

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, I think plain language is always the greatest path to go with, regardless of your audience. You want to make it simple, and I don't think of that as dumbing down what you're writing. I think it's making very... making it very plain and very clear.

253

00:41:43.650 --> 00:41:44.720

Michelle Sanders Parks: you know.

254

00:41:44.720 --> 00:42:09.700

Michelle Sanders Parks: In some of the writing, we, again, I mentioned, love our acronyms, so my rule of thumb is, you know, following a lot of the style guides out there, is that the first time you use an acronym, you, you know, give it the full name, you put the acronym in parentheses, and then you can use it, that throughout. I probably do that more for internal audiences, because it's really long to say the Department of General Services, and every department

255

00:42:09.700 --> 00:42:15.930

Michelle Sanders Parks: It has these big, long names, and so acronyms within our audiences is important, but externally.

256

00:42:15.930 --> 00:42:24.760

Michelle Sanders Parks: Not everybody's gonna know. There are a few acronyms that the public might know, but I always feel like it's really important to spell it out, and then try not to use it

257

00:42:24.890 --> 00:42:30.800

Michelle Sanders Parks: You know, a ton of times, and try to avoid having to even deal with acronyms in the first place.

258

00:42:31.870 --> 00:42:50.600

Khalifa Idris: Yeah, I think that makes sense. There's a follow-up question, because you mentioned acronyms there. So, I think you kind of answered it, but I'll ask it anyway. In your opinion, do you think it's best to avoid acronyms altogether when speaking to external customers, even if the acronyms are identified in the earlier part of the body of the email?

259

00:42:51.130 --> 00:43:06.450

Michelle Sanders Parks: I wouldn't say that that's a rule that I live by. I mean, you want to make sure your message is clear. Again, I use the example of my department's name. We're, you know, for the external world, we're the Tennessee Department of General Services. That's pretty long.

260

00:43:06.450 --> 00:43:13.459

Michelle Sanders Parks: So it makes sense, if you're gonna say that in multiple places, to use an acronym.

261

00:43:13.460 --> 00:43:18.720

Michelle Sanders Parks: But, there are a lot of internal acronyms that we use that I just avoid.

262

00:43:18.720 --> 00:43:36.589

Michelle Sanders Parks: In fact, a quick little fact here, when I first started working for state government, the acronyms were so confusing to me. I created an acronym guide, and eventually, my guide was so long that it's now posted on our website, and it's something that we give to new employees.

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00:43:36.790 --> 00:43:44.020

Michelle Sanders Parks: Because... In a spreadsheet, if you were to put it on paper, it's at least 5 pages of acronyms.

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00:43:44.780 --> 00:43:46.389

Michelle Sanders Parks: I'm not kidding.

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00:43:47.570 --> 00:43:49.739

Khalifa Idris: That's a lot of acronyms.

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00:43:49.740 --> 00:44:06.660

Michelle Sanders Parks: So, it's kind of crazy when you need a guide, but I've found that it's very helpful. But again, think about that. For an internal audience, we need a guide to help us understand, so definitely don't want to confuse the public with all of that.

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00:44:07.500 --> 00:44:13.799

Khalifa Idris: Yeah, I think that makes perfect sense, and thank you for setting up that guide. I'm sure there's been people that have benefited from that.

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00:44:13.800 --> 00:44:19.969

Michelle Sanders Parks: I hear from our onboarding people that that's a fan favorite when they join our team.

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00:44:20.700 --> 00:44:22.160

Khalifa Idris: That's awesome.

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00:44:22.950 --> 00:44:41.900

Khalifa Idris: Okay, moving back to you, Lucas, this is, I think, on topic or on brand for the conversation around nuclear waste. So this question is, some people don't just... just don't trust government. How do you communicate for those who are more prone to believe the disinformation than your information?

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00:44:42.830 --> 00:45:02.500

Lukas Hardonk: It's a great question. Before I answer, I just want to say it's a relief to hear that, Michelle, almost, about the amount of acronyms, because we also have a guide that's multiple pages long, and every time someone new joins the team, we... we say it all back out again, the full length, and it just... it makes the conversation, like, 5-10 minutes longer with the amount of acronyms, so...

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00:45:02.650 --> 00:45:22.589

Lukas Hardonk: the struggle is real. Yeah, thank you for the question. It's a great one. You're right, like, some people simply won't trust government, and the bad answer to that question is that some people we just won't ever quite get through to. The more detailed answer, is to, where possible, you know.

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00:45:22.870 --> 00:45:41.819

Lukas Hardonk: sort of leverage people with... if we're talking about a specific community, so if we're talking about the waste facility, for example, use people within that community or groups within that community who, who the audience already trusts. So, for example, we just got some public opinion research, results back that told us

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00:45:42.230 --> 00:45:59.430

Lukas Hardonk: That generally across Canada, it varies by region, but generally across Canada, three main ways that people prefer to receive information are through regular mail, email, and local news. So that tells us... I believe local news was number 1 or number two, so that tells us that people trust local news.

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00:45:59.430 --> 00:46:11.370

Lukas Hardonk: They want to receive information through local news, so rather than trying to communicate with them constantly through social media, it means we also need to leverage the media, because that's where they go for information, that's a source of information that they trust.

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00:46:11.370 --> 00:46:26.219

Lukas Hardonk: Similar with receiving a hard copy of something in the regular mail or by email. You know, for other areas, different projects, there might be local influencers outside of media that you can leverage as well to help spread your messaging.

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00:46:26.470 --> 00:46:41.820

Lukas Hardonk: an influencer also doesn't have to be someone who has 500,000, a million followers. It could be someone within a community who has 200 followers, but maybe their influence is largely offline, and as long as they have some sort of influence or authority within that community.

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00:46:41.820 --> 00:46:50.599

Lukas Hardonk: People will listen, and if they're repeating your message, it's gonna get through much more effectively than someone who represents the government coming in and saying, this is safe.

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00:46:50.800 --> 00:47:04.420

Lukas Hardonk: So yeah, leverage, leverage influencers if you can. I would also say, you know, one thing that we do is, whether it's nuclear waste or, you know, transportation of radioactive substances.

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00:47:04.420 --> 00:47:17.390

Lukas Hardonk: We also try to pull from or amplify, I guess, messaging that's put out by the International Atomic Agency, by other nuclear regulators, like the ONR in the UK, to show that

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00:47:17.390 --> 00:47:34.570

Lukas Hardonk: you know, what we're doing to regulate nuclear energy and nuclear materials in Canada isn't just something we're coming up with, it's based on global research, global best practices, and global standards. So, sort of reinforcing our message by leveraging others.

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00:47:34.570 --> 00:47:46.030

Lukas Hardonk: But also, using influencers, or... I'm sorry, influencers, or media, or any... any other resource that is trusted within that community, or within that audience that you're trying to reach.

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00:47:47.420 --> 00:47:55.049

Khalifa Idris: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, reaching out to local, local influences, can often be more,

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00:47:55.340 --> 00:48:09.769

Khalifa Idris: meaningful to those people that are finding it hard to believe the government, so I think that... that makes sense. Following on from that question, Lucas, this is kind of related. What do you think the distinction

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00:48:09.870 --> 00:48:21.229

Khalifa Idris: the... what is the distinction the government makes between misinformation and disinformation? And to what extent do the mitigation strategies for each overlap or differ in your writing?

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00:48:22.110 --> 00:48:23.860

Lukas Hardonk: Okay, so...

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00:48:24.010 --> 00:48:35.990

Lukas Hardonk: disinformation and misinformation are separate, and there's also a third I very briefly mentioned at the start of the presentation, and that's malinformation. So, within the Government of Canada, departments have

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00:48:36.270 --> 00:48:46.409

Lukas Hardonk: there's no, like, absolute standard definition, but the Center for Cybersecurity defines disinformation as false information that is intended to cause harm.

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00:48:46.500 --> 00:49:04.549

Lukas Hardonk: Misinformation is false information that is not intended to cause harm, so it could be completely innocent, someone sharing this information. And then malinformation is kind of a mix of the both, where it stems from the truth, but it's been spun in a way or distorted in a way to mislead someone.

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00:49:04.620 --> 00:49:29.410

Lukas Hardonk: The mitigation strategies for all three are pretty similar. For us at the CNSC, the focus is more on the actual impact of the information, not necessarily the type of information. You know, whether the false information is intended to cause harm or not, the bottom line is that it's false, and therefore, someone could believe it, and it could have

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00:49:29.410 --> 00:49:31.409

Lukas Hardonk: Negative safety outcomes.

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00:49:31.410 --> 00:49:51.110

Lukas Hardonk: So for us, it's how do we actually stop this information altogether? So, for example, pre-bunking is a very effective tool, so providing, you know, we do a good job of identifying what topics are most vulnerable to false and misleading information, which, sorry, is sort of the umbrella term that I use for all three. So, for example, nuclear waste.

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00:49:51.130 --> 00:49:55.910

Lukas Hardonk: So, we are currently working on a host of social media content.

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00:49:56.150 --> 00:50:15.320

Lukas Hardonk: That sort of responds to the issues that we see being discussed around nuclear waste, such as environmental protection, transportation of waste. There's one other two that's skipping my brain right now, but then we can put that information out on social media, so the idea is that before someone sees false or misleading information related to nuclear waste.

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00:50:15.320 --> 00:50:32.750

Lukas Hardonk: hopefully they're seeing our messaging, they have that sort of then pre-existing knowledge about it and how it's safely regulated, so when they do experience that mis, dis, or malinformation, they can sort of, you know, they can recognize it as false or misleading, and be less prone to believing it.

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00:50:33.160 --> 00:50:45.349

Lukas Hardonk: in the interest of time, I won't... you know, there's sort of a list of options to run through, but that's sort of the biggest, the biggest tool, I guess, that we have at our disposal to pushing back against it, or to preventing it.

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00:50:46.570 --> 00:50:56.950

Khalifa Idris: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. And it's funny, at the beginning of your presentation, you mentioned Chernobyl, and as soon as you started talking about nuclear waste, that's exactly what I thought of. So what would be the pre-bunking for that?

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00:50:58.870 --> 00:51:01.650

Lukas Hardonk: For, specifically for Chernobyl?

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00:51:01.650 --> 00:51:04.690

Khalifa Idris: No, for the TV shows you were referencing.

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00:51:04.690 --> 00:51:26.990

Lukas Hardonk: Oh, so we don't really get into much talking specifically about them, but, you know, what they've done is sort of reinforce, I guess, a fear among the public. You know, they're very... it's very helpful to have these series, you know, the Chernobyl series, or Fukushima, Three Mile Island, whatever it might be, because, of course, it resurfaces history, and it reminds us of

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00:51:26.990 --> 00:51:49.979

Lukas Hardonk: what, you know, what can happen. But at the same time, it does naturally sort of introduce an anxiety among the public. So for us, although we don't specifically reference these events, the general anxiety is that nuclear is dangerous, nuclear is bad. So, you know, our role as a regulator isn't to say, no, it's great, you know.

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00:51:50.120 --> 00:52:10.090

Lukas Hardonk: we love nuclear, our role is to say, this is what we're doing to make sure that it's safe, and then showing the research that we do to, you know, that goes behind our regulations to make sure that it's safe. So it's sort of like an indirect way, I guess, of addressing those concerns that stem from popular culture, but that's what we found to be the best way to do it.

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00:52:11.450 --> 00:52:20.290

Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome. Thank you, Lucas. Over to you, Michelle. So this question is asking, do you use any behavioral sirens?

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00:52:20.290 --> 00:52:36.229

Khalifa Idris: to inform your comms work? If so, how? Example, we often use something called, COMBI in the UK, so that's C-O-M hyphen B-I in the UK, looking at people's capacity, opportunity, motivation to take a particular action.

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00:52:37.940 --> 00:52:42.669

Michelle Sanders Parks: Wow, that's a great question. Can I have Lukas answer it instead?

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00:52:43.120 --> 00:52:54.320

Michelle Sanders Parks: Because I don't really deal so much with the general public, that probably isn't as relative to me as it might be for Lucas. I'm dealing with internal audiences,

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00:52:54.320 --> 00:53:07.589

Michelle Sanders Parks: So I do have, like, personas and things that I've created to help me navigate how to write for those different audiences, but Lukas certainly, not to throw you under the bus here, but if you've got some better insight, you might help me answer that question.

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00:53:07.590 --> 00:53:31.999

Lukas Hardonk: No, Michelle. No, it is a great question. Look, I don't... I probably don't have a great answer for it. This one stuck out to me just because of that follow-up question about CommBI, and I'm in the very early stages of starting to build out a communications evaluation framework for the CNSC, and within that, I was looking at some information that's available,

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00:53:32.000 --> 00:53:36.389

Lukas Hardonk: on the UK's website, and related to COMBI.

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00:53:36.640 --> 00:53:41.319

Lukas Hardonk: I really don't have a great answer to this question. I, you know,

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00:53:42.190 --> 00:53:58.329

Lukas Hardonk: so we... I work on the public environment team, and we're regularly scanning social media feedback received from outreach events, public opinion research, public inquiries that are coming in, traditional media, basically trying to get a sense of what people are saying, what they're feeling.

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00:53:58.330 --> 00:54:02.200

Lukas Hardonk: At a very high level, positive, negative, neutral.

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00:54:02.200 --> 00:54:06.319

Lukas Hardonk: And then drafting communications that respond to that.

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00:54:06.970 --> 00:54:17.679

Lukas Hardonk: Yeah, I mean, I guess, if anything, it provides important context to our work. It helps us answer specific questions that they're asking.

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00:54:18.150 --> 00:54:19.909

Lukas Hardonk: But I can't say that I'm...

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00:54:20.150 --> 00:54:25.319

Lukas Hardonk: I'm educated enough on behavioral science to get too much into the weeds of it, sorry.

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00:54:25.740 --> 00:54:34.490

Michelle Sanders Parks: No, that's okay. I also feel like a lot of what I do is more anecdotal and experience-based. I mean, I can't really say this would

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00:54:34.770 --> 00:54:47.920

Michelle Sanders Parks: apply to behavioral science, but we do use metrics, you know, back-end metrics on our website and the platforms that we use to see how people engage with our content, and that helps inform us

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00:54:47.920 --> 00:54:54.840

Michelle Sanders Parks: You know, whether or not, like, say, on social media, you can determine pretty quickly whether or not people are engaging with your post.

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00:54:54.840 --> 00:55:03.190

Michelle Sanders Parks: So we do look at that information, but it's just one aspect of what we're looking at. We don't solely rely on those kinds of things.

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00:55:04.260 --> 00:55:06.039

Michelle Sanders Parks: I hope that was helpful.

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00:55:06.440 --> 00:55:19.569

Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome. Thank you both. And just to close out our Q&A section there, what are your views of using AI to tailor to audiences or to an audience? I'll start with you, Michelle.

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00:55:21.120 --> 00:55:36.420

Michelle Sanders Parks: Well, probably to some people's unpopular opinion, I'm actually a fan of AI because I feel like it is, it is very helpful, it can be very helpful and useful. It's not something that I would rely on to, like, completely generate

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00:55:36.530 --> 00:55:43.699

Michelle Sanders Parks: content for me. I think the value in AI is giving it the right information.

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00:55:43.700 --> 00:56:08.629

Michelle Sanders Parks: and asking its input. So, I use it a lot of times, like, in an interview capacity. So, for example, with the message that I shared earlier, you know, my first part... the first thing I do is to gather the information. So, I go to the subject matter experts about the building closure, and I ask them every question I can possibly think of. And then, as I start to craft the message, that's when I might go into AI,

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00:56:08.630 --> 00:56:20.100

Michelle Sanders Parks: and say, hey, I'm developing a message, here's the audience, here's all the things that I know. Am I missing anything? Is there anything that, I need that I don't have?

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00:56:20.100 --> 00:56:36.009

Michelle Sanders Parks: And that oftentimes can be very helpful, because it might... it might point out something that I hadn't considered. So, I use it like that. And then I also can use it sometimes for adapting. But again, I think it's all about the prompts. It's not as much the tool.

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00:56:36.010 --> 00:56:48.560

Michelle Sanders Parks: as it is the person who's asking for it to help you. So I'm pretty detailed, and I've shared that with some of the people I work with, and they're like, oh my gosh, I never thought about using AI this way. So,

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00:56:48.710 --> 00:56:55.000

Michelle Sanders Parks: I think it can be a very good resource, but not something that I completely rely on 100%.

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00:56:56.140 --> 00:57:04.169

Khalifa Idris: Okay, awesome, good to hear. And over to you, Lukas. Same question, what are reviews of using AI to tailor to audiences or to an audience?

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00:57:04.170 --> 00:57:08.929

Lukas Hardonk: Yeah, so there's a couple ways that we use it to first,

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00:57:09.150 --> 00:57:27.699

Lukas Hardonk: understand audiences. So, within one of the tools that we use, there's a feature that helps us understand. I think I've just very briefly touched on audience sentiment, so I'll use nuclear waste again as the example, whether sort of recently the conversation has been more positive, negative, neutral,

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00:57:27.700 --> 00:57:35.260

Lukas Hardonk: So that gives us a sense of where the conversation is headed among audiences. We have to be very careful with it, though, because it is,

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00:57:35.260 --> 00:58:00.030

Lukas Hardonk: guided by artificial intelligence, and it's not always correct. There's one funny example from another organization that had been using it, and they were assessing the conversation related to downhill skiing, and it was tagging every message that contained the word downhill as a negative, even though people were glowing about downhill skiing. So you have to be very careful about how it's used. Similarly, we do use AI to summarize

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00:58:00.230 --> 00:58:19.299

Lukas Hardonk: within the same tool, what people are asking, the topics they're talking about, or the subtopics within the main topics that they're talking about. But both of these can be hit or miss, and still require a lot of manual verification. Nothing... when we're trying to understand our audiences, nothing will ever beat the...

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00:58:19.300 --> 00:58:35.430

Lukas Hardonk: you know, interacting with audiences, manually reviewing, although it takes time. AI can support these functions, but can't completely replace them, because a lot of what we're dealing with is emotion, and of course, AI has a hard time, quite often, reading emotion.

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00:58:35.680 --> 00:58:38.089

Lukas Hardonk: Yeah, so I would leave it there.

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00:58:40.090 --> 00:58:55.420

Khalifa Idris: Hey, awesome. Thank you both very much. We've had some incredible wisdom from both of our speakers, and I'd like to ask you all to join me in giving Michelle and Lukas a virtual round of applause. And a physical one, if you want to do it.

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00:58:55.700 --> 00:59:04.010

Khalifa Idris: And most importantly, thanks to you and Audience Investing in learning and being so engaged with this topic. There's been some really great questions there.

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00:59:04.510 --> 00:59:14.739

Khalifa Idris: The team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content, and we really appreciate your responses.

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00:59:15.380 --> 00:59:22.269

Khalifa Idris: Before you go, and while you're responding to that poll, I want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon.

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00:59:22.380 --> 00:59:30.190

Khalifa Idris: If you're not available to be there live, remember that you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording, so you can watch that whenever it suits you.

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00:59:30.570 --> 00:59:41.939

Khalifa Idris: So, in the next two weeks, we will... we have the How to Stay Motivated When Priorities Keep Shifting on staying focused and energized when your organization's directions keep changing.

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00:59:41.940 --> 00:59:51.379

Khalifa Idris: In early September, we have How to Scale Government Innovation Without Losing the Edge on finding innovative solutions to complex problems while working within government guardrails.

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00:59:51.380 --> 01:00:06.979

Khalifa Idris: And then at the end of September, we have an AI Skills Lab edition for... on AI for better briefings, to learn how to use AI to adapt your tone and messaging for policy audiences, building on everything we've covered today, which is actually relevant to the last question that we just asked.

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01:00:07.380 --> 01:00:08.370

Khalifa Idris: Okay.

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01:00:08.380 --> 01:00:17.979

Khalifa Idris: That is all the time we have for today. We hope you find it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers, to everyone who's made today happen, and to you for taking time out of your busy days.

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01:00:17.980 --> 01:00:29.449

Khalifa Idris: Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources. Don't forget to comment under my post, and we hope to see you at another Apolitical event very soon. Have a great day.