



Not in Kansas any more

Stephen Cashman spots some project management challenges of putting a communication strategy into action

I've just had one of those 'not in Kansas any more' moments. At the risk of being accused of being camp (camp, moi?) and because my reference could seem a little obscure, I'll explain.

In that groundbreaking family favourite movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), a key moment is when the heroine Dorothy starts to realise that she has been transported to a completely new world. A world of magic and fantastical creatures, which is in full, brilliant, sparkling technicolour as opposed to the boring, dull and mundane black and white of the down-home, Depression-era farm she has come from. As this realisation strikes her, the screenplay reads:

Dorothy: [has just arrived in Oz, looking around and awed at the beauty and splendor] Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas any more.

Dorothy: [after a pause] We must be over the rainbow!

Please believe me – if you can – I'm not using a strange (and possibly illegal) hallucinogen. It's just that for me, a vital moment of truth in devising and implementing a communication strategy (or any other strategy for that matter), is when the divide between thinking and theorising is crossed. So – *kapow!* – it's time to put all the shining creative thoughts and ideas of the plan into practical action. Suddenly things are for real, and 'we're not in Kansas any more'.

I highlighted the importance of this turning point by devoting a whole chapter to it in *Thinking Big!*¹ Hence chapter 11, 'The Proof of the Pudding', notes: 'No matter how incisive, insightful and rigorous your analysis is, and regardless of how creative, ingenious and inspired your plans are, ultimately these stages will count for nothing if they can't be put into action.'

And at the time of writing, the communication strategy for *Hartlepool Dockfest 2009* is poised, ready to rise to this very challenge.

To give a little background: *Dockfest* has been conceived – and needs to be put across – as a bridge which connects the town's much-loved biennial Maritime Festival and

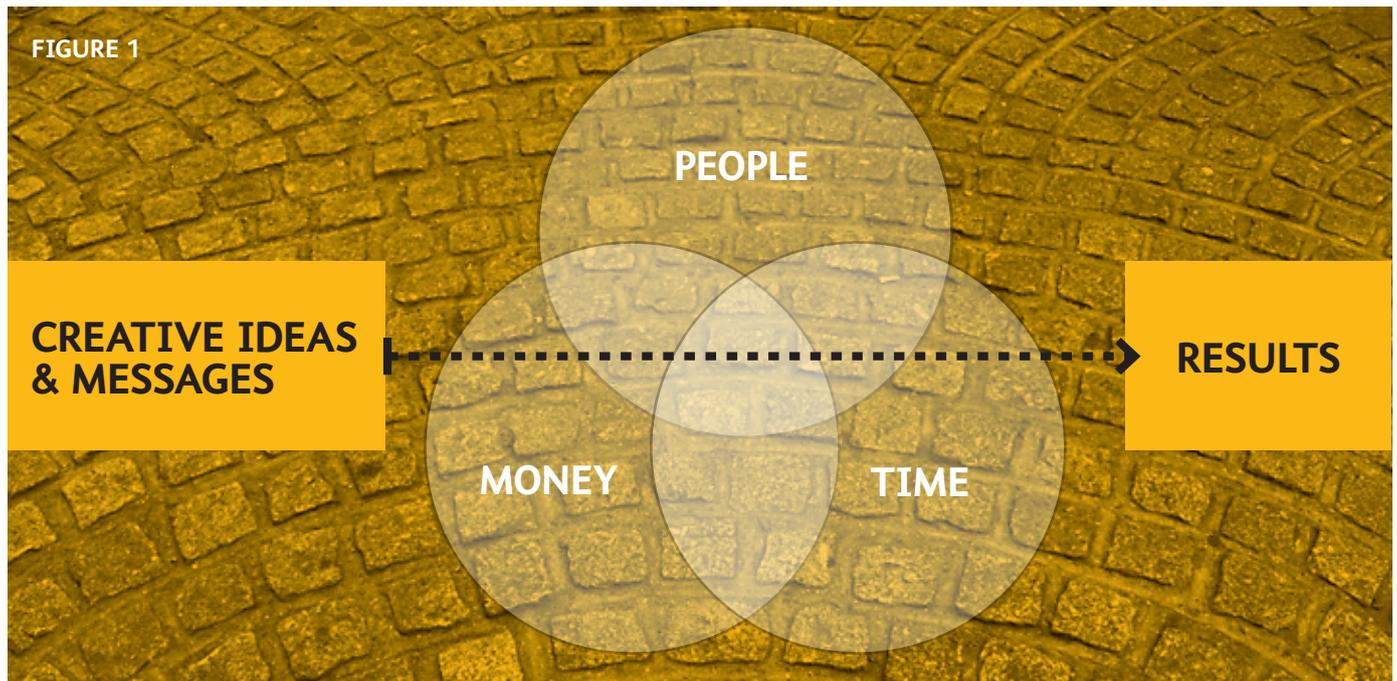
the Tall Ships Races 2010, which are being hosted by Hartlepool and are (possibly) the biggest things to happen in the town for an extremely long time.

Dockfest will be delivered on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 July, providing Hartlepool residents and visitors with two days of festival entertainment – popular music, street theatre, community arts, circus skills performers and comedians – provided on a dressed and decorated festival site which is offered at no charge to our audience.

Developing and signing off the communication strategy for this major event provided a striking illustration of the need for effective project management in such settings.

This was particularly the case since, once the core ideas, messages and tools that make up our planned communications mix were decided upon, ensuring things happened according to plan relied upon the input and involvement of a range of colleagues and of a number of partner organisations. Hence conducting the contributions of such a diverse orchestra of players called for a consistency about the core message and a clarity of focus on the means of delivery.

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There's a mantra in the world of project management that successful projects are delivered on time, on budget and on specification. But it seems clear to me that putting a communication (or any other) strategy into action successfully needs another trio of concerns: three factors that need to be skilfully managed to realise the strategy's aims and message. Indeed these three are all about managing the use and deployment of differing sorts of resources. They are:

- people
- money
- time.

Figure 1 illustrates how resource management can turn ideas into practical results.

So with *Dockfest*, we have devised the core messages of 'free fun for all', 'in an entertaining setting', which was 'new and different' and with a hint of 'something amazing on its way' (i.e. the Tall Ships Races). Now we are wielding this bundle of concepts to achieve the aim of heightening people's awareness through the efforts and contributions of our team using three principal resources.

We are encouraging our team –



which includes marketing and other professionals from inside and outside the authority – by using mechanisms such as briefing meetings, one-to-one discussions and creative opportunities.

The combined time of everyone working on the *Dockfest* communications strategy is severely limited by media deadlines and the actual delivery time and date of the event that our communications

support. Thus the use of planning diaries, grids and Gantt charts is essential to make sure that the media coverage for *Dockfest* and its star act The Lightning Seeds (generated through the work of our press office) is coordinated with the bus advertising and print distribution put in place by our marketing team.

And then, in these times of economic stricture – especially in the public sector – everyone involved, at the majority of meetings, is tasked with closely and stringently monitoring the costs of putting the communications ideas into action.

Such is the exhilaration of seeing

ideas realised, that it could be all too easy to lose sight of the importance of carefully managing and stewarding these core resources as the communication messages start to reach their target audiences. However, sustaining them so that they achieve a crescendo at the required moment means taking care that each element makes the optimum contribution at the most appropriate time. It is as if the importance of the initial creative ideas has been subsumed into the practicalities of implementation.

They haven't gone away. They will re-emerge when the planned delivery is achieved. It's just that when it comes to putting communication strategy into action, we're definitely not in Kansas any more. ●

1. **Stephen Cashman**, *Thinking BIG!* Arts Council England, 2003, p. 75. Available from the AMA at £10 + P&P. To order a copy, e-mail andrea@a-m-a.co.uk



Stephen Cashman
Strategic Arts Manager, Hartlepool Borough Council
e stephen.cashman@hartlepool.gov.uk