Engaging People

Audience segmentation – just who are you talking to?

Prompted by the release of Defra's Framework for pro-environmental behaviours, **Penny Walker** *looks at audience segmentation.*

What do we mean by segmentation?

Segmentation is the "division of a population into groups or clusters with common characteristics relevant to a brand's marketing" (Creative Ring media dictionary).

Why would we want to do it?

Quite simply, to increase the effectiveness of our work.

"Don't forget that any segmentation (no matter how few groups) which generates different messages will produce better results than a single message." (Martin Parkinson)

Assume a situation where we want people to behave differently. What are the ways we should communicate with them, to maximise the chances that they will? The answer will be different, depending on who they are.

Pro-environment behaviours

The work recently published by Defra looks specifically at behaviour change around environmentally-preferential behaviours, in England, in the private (domestic rather than work) sphere.

Defra has identified 12 'headline' behaviours to focus on (see box 1). As Chris Church – featured in the previous 'Engaging People' column – has pointed out, these skilfully avoid any suggestion that getting politically active as a citizen might be a useful behaviour. That is an insight for another day!

Defra's segmentation

In researching how to segment England's population to develop more effective communication approaches, Defra has identified seven segments, and mapped them according to its analysis of their ability and willingness to act (ie adopt the

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Box 1
Defra's Twelve Headline Goals
Personal transport
Use more efficient vehicles
Use car less for short trips
Avoid unnecessary flights (short haul)

Homes: energy
Install insulation
Better energy management
Install micro generation

Homes: waste
Increase recycling
Waste less (food)

Homes Water
More responsible water usage

Eco-products
Buy energy efficient products
Eat more food that is locally in season
Adopt lower impact diet

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desired behaviours, see figure 1).

This is not the only segmentation model available to us, and indeed some people have criticised the Defra approach because it explains reported environmental behaviour by reference to attitudes about environmental behaviour, rather than in relation to independent variables.

Other segmentation models

One such criticism has come from Chris Rose who, together with colleague Pat Dade from mainstream brand consultancy Cultural Dynamics Strategy & Marketing, suggests using Values Mode segmentation instead.

Values Mode research in the UK has identified a dozen segments within three clusters, based on Maslow's model of human needs (see box 2).

Other segmentations include a recent classic – popularised in Surowiekci's The Wisdom of Crowds – based on our tendencies to be altruistic or not. People may be 'selfish' (about a quarter of people), 'altruists' (a small minority) and 'conditional consenters' (the biggest

group). This three-way split is taken from the experimental economics work of Ernst Fehr and Simon Gächter. Since they are the biggest group, the conditional consenters may be the most important to target. They will contribute to the wider social good, as long as they do not see 'free riders' getting away with it.

Steve Connor, of communications agency Creative Concern, comments: "Those of us involved in progressive politics and behavioural change are all too often representing the shrill call of the altruist, barracking the irredeemably selfish while leaving the consensual masses looking on with confusion."

An older and more familiar segmentation, specifically looking at change, is Everett Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory. This divides people into innovators (tiny percentage), early adopters (under a sixth), early majority (about a third), late majority (also a third) and laggards (a sixth). The theory has been used by companies introducing technological innovation, and also by public and charitable bodies in fields including health education and family planning.
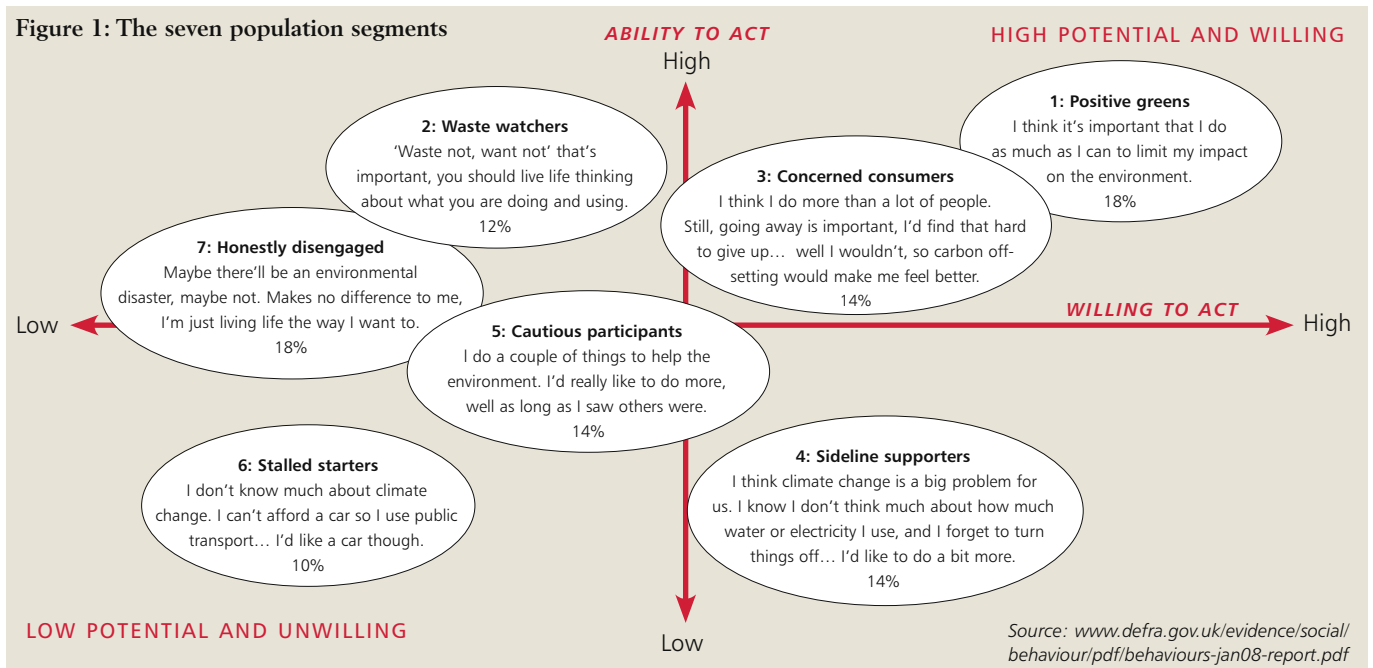
We're in a segment too

Part of the insight is to recognise that our assumptions about what will work may be based on our own place in the segmentation. This is beautifully illustrated – but not explicitly recognised – in Defra's own report. According to Defra's field work, those who already buy 'environmentally friendly' goods apparently support more product labelling (page 31) – presumably they are assuming that because it works for them, it will work for other people. This is not a great assumption, because the 'other' people are likely to be in a different segment.

If we recognise what segment we belong to, we will be better able to critically examine our assumptions about what kind of communications will work,

Figure 1: The seven population segments

ABILITY TO ACT — High

HIGH POTENTIAL AND WILLING

2: Waste watchers
'Waste not, want not' that's important, you should live life thinking about what you are doing and using.
12%

1: Positive greens
I think it's important that I do as much as I can to limit my impact on the environment.
18%

3: Concerned consumers
I think I do more than a lot of people. Still, going away is important, I'd find that hard to give up… well I wouldn't, so carbon off-setting would make me feel better.
14%

7: Honestly disengaged
Maybe there'll be an environmental disaster, maybe not. Makes no difference to me, I'm just living life the way I want to.
18%

Low — **WILLING TO ACT** — High

5: Cautious participants
I do a couple of things to help the environment. I'd really like to do more, well as long as I saw others were.
14%

6: Stalled starters
I don't know much about climate change. I can't afford a car so I use public transport… I'd like a car though.
10%

4: Sideline supporters
I think climate change is a big problem for us. I know I don't think much about how much water or electricity I use, and I forget to turn things off… I'd like to do a bit more.
14%

LOW POTENTIAL AND UNWILLING

Low

Source: www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/ behaviour/pdf/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf

and replace them with conclusions based on better evidence.

Using segmentation

As with any approach to communications, the first step is to be very clear about whom it is you want to communicate with. It might be a geographical group (people who live in a particular neighbourhood), a group defined by role (middle managers in your organisation) or by an existing behaviour (people who drive their kids to school).

The next step is to figure out which segment or segments these people are likely to be in, in relation to one or more segmentation models. Ideally this will be justified by formal research, but in the absence of this some educated guesswork will be needed. Both Defra's long report, and the Values Mode work, contain descriptions of the segments and help you to recognise who you're dealing with. Remember that there may be people from more than one distinct segment in your target group.

Then you use what you know about that segment to develop your communication. This includes:
- What do they value?
- What, specifically, are you asking them to do?
- What communication channels do they pay attention to?
- Whose opinion do they value?
- What do they perceive as the barriers and opportunities associated with what you are asking them to do?

The outcome could mean that, although your reason for asking for a particular change in behaviour is motivated by environmental concern, the communications approach you end up taking doesn't even hint at environmental issues, because you know that doing so would be an immediate turn-off for this group.

Fascinating detail in relation to how to motivate carbon-reducing behaviour is given in Rose, Dade and Scott's report for the Centre for Sustainable Energy and local authorities in South-West England, 'Research into motivating prospectors, settlers and pioneers to change behaviours that affect climate emissions'.

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Find out more:

Defra's research is available here: www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/ behaviour/index.htm

Values modes and climate change - see the work of Chris Rose and Pat Dade here www.campaignstrategy.org/ resources.html

Fehr & Gächter's work is cited in Surowiecki's The Wisdom of Crowds (Random House, 2004).

Everett Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 1983 and later editions.

Martin Parkinson www.parkinson. greenisp.org/greenpsy.html

Steve Connor, Creative Concern www.creativeconcern.com

This article was inspired by a discussion on the Compass e-network of sustainable development communicators www.compassnetwork.org

Box 2
Settlers (approximately 20 per cent of the UK national population), made up of
- Roots
- Smooth sailing
- Brave new world
- Certainty first

Prospectors (c 40 per cent)
- Golden dreamers
- Happy followers
- Now people
- Tomorrow people

Pioneers (c 40 per cent)
- Transitionals
- Concerned ethicals
- Flexible individuals
- Transcenders

From 'Using Values Modes' by Chris Rose and Pat Dade, on the Campaign Strategy website