
STORYBOARD

Aims

- ◆ To show the PR value of a video news release (VNR).
- ◆ To develop narrative skills, eg scripts, storyboarding.

Outcome

- ◆ Participants increase understanding of how 'news' is created, and its potential for influencing public perceptions and behaviour.

What you need

Copies of the **Actionpage: Storyboard**; flip chart paper and marker pens.

What you do

- ▷ Explain that PR departments often commission VNRs which are distributed to TV news producers in order to publicise their activities. These are sometimes used to counter bad publicity or draw attention to an organisation's operations or concerns.
- ▷ Divide participants into two groups. Give copies of one brief to one group and the second brief to the other. Split into small groups of three/four if necessary.
- ▷ Explain that the task is to produce a storyboard for a VNR on the nuclear energy issue which meets the requirements of their brief – one represents the position of British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), the other the views of Greenpeace. The information is taken from BNFL and Greenpeace websites. The story will need to meet the demands of TV news producers. A VNR has about four minutes of footage with a script which only describes what is being shown. It could include interviews, clips to illustrate the main points etc.
- ▷ Explain that a storyboard includes sketches of the shots, sound effects and description (see example on next page). Frames should be rectangles in the proportion 4:3.
- ▷ They should develop ideas using rough sketches. The final product should be copied onto flip chart paper for presentation to the whole group.

Whole group discussion

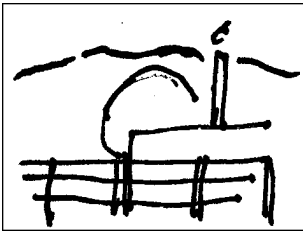
- ▷ Display storyboards and allow groups to view each others' work.
- ▷ Ask one of the TNC groups to talk through their storyboard and explain the process they went through.
- ◆ Why do you think your story would gain the interest of a TV news producer?
- ◆ Who is your audience? How have you tried to gain their interest and convince them of the strength of your arguments?
- ◆ How did you create a sense of credibility in your release?
- ◆ How did you make your release visually appealing?
- ◆ What other ideas did you consider but not include in the final product? Why?
- ◆ What information could be disputed by critics?
- ◆ How might the material in the VNR be used by a news editor to make a story that contradicted the original intention of the release?
- ▷ Ask other TNC groups if they took a different approach. If so, explore their strategy.
- ▷ Ask one of the campaign groups to present their storyboard and discuss as above. Follow this with more general consideration of the value of VNRs.
- ◆ What are the pros and cons of using a VNR to TNCs and campaign groups, eg cost, audience, impact, editorial control?
- ◆ Does the use of VNRs by TV news programmes threaten the impartial reporting of issues?

Key ideas

- ◆ TNCs commission specialist firms to produce VNRs. The firm also contacts TV news editors offering the resulting footage. They are very successful in gaining coverage of stories which a TV company may not be prepared to cover with its own crews.
- ◆ The firm is able to get the TNC's message over directly without the intervention of an outside camera crew. However, the TV news editor may use the material to suit their own angle on the story through the voice-over.
- ◆ VNR is a relatively high cost medium and is beyond the pocket of most campaign groups.
- ◆ Greenpeace supplies unedited, raw footage to broadcasters in the UK, eg occupation of Brent Spar oil platform and Shell petrol stations, harassment of whaling ships.
- ◆ ITN produces national news programmes for commercial TV stations. It has a highly profitable sector, Corporate Television Networks (CTN), which produces corporate VNRs. ITN has been accused of withdrawing stories because they reflect badly on CTN's corporate clients, eg Shell involvement in oppression of Ogoni people in Nigeria.

Follow-up

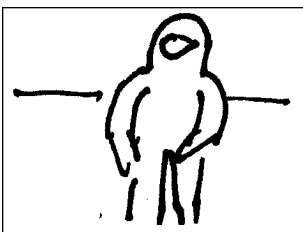
- ◆ Ask group to monitor TV news stories over a one week period and try to identify items which might have originated from VNRs.
- ◆ Look at the websites of two of the largest corporate video producers: www.bulletin-int.com/ and www.ctn-tv.com/.
- ◆ Choose a contentious issue which is attracting media attention. Ask one group to produce a storyboard which supports one side of the argument, and another group to produce one which represents the other side. Produce a VNR based on the storyboard using interviews, still photos etc.



- 1 location shot of Sellafield hills of Lake District in background



- 2 medium shot of Greenpeace research ship, Sirius diver returning to surface
sound of waves breaking against the ship



- 3 medium shot of researcher taking soil samples wearing protective clothing
sound of digging



- 4 interview with local doctor
camera looks over interviewer's shoulder
explains why she is concerned about health – especially concentrations of childhood leukaemia

Actionpage: Storyboard – BNFL

Many organisations use video news releases (VNRs) to create a good impression of themselves and their work. Sometimes this will be in response to bad publicity. A specialist firm is commissioned to put together video clips which cover all angles of a story.

A VNR usually has about four minutes of footage with a script which only describes what is being shown. A further 20 mins of more general footage without script is added at the end. This may include archive material from film libraries, newly shot footage or interviews. This footage is offered to TV news editors. If they are interested, the TV news production team will edit down the material into a news item to fit whatever space they have, and add their own voice-over.

You are a production team of News Bulletin TV which produces VNRs for many international corporate clients. British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) has commissioned you to produce a VNR to counteract recent bad publicity arising from Greenpeace claims that radioactive contamination around the Sellafield site is comparable with Chernobyl.

BNFL recycles nuclear waste from Europe, Japan and North America. The aim of the VNR is to reach prime time national news broadcasts around the world. It should highlight:

- ◆ BNFL is the world leader in nuclear clean-up and has the tools and expertise to win business around the world, especially the US, where it has a \$2.5bn order book
 - ◆ BNFL is investing £1.7bn in a new waste retrieval and decommissioning plant which uses the latest technology to improve the management of wastes
 - ◆ 85% of all radiation received by the public is from natural sources, eg radon gas which is released from rocks; less than 0.1% is from discharges from the nuclear industry
 - ◆ BNFL sets itself much lower radiation dose limits for its workers, contractors and visitors than those enforced by the UK government
 - ◆ in 1997 the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents awarded BNFL five gold and two silver awards for health and safety at work
 - ◆ BNFL's plants are designed, built, operated and maintained to minimise the risk of incidents which would affect the workforce, the public or the environment
 - ◆ processing used fuel enables 97% to be reused, reducing the need for mining uranium ore
 - ◆ BNFL has transported used fuel for over 30 years, covering 16 million miles without a single release of radioactivity
 - ◆ the nuclear industry offers the only practical means of reducing the emission of the greenhouse gases produced when fossil fuels are used to generate electricity.
- ▷ Produce a storyboard for a four minute VNR, using a series of 4:3 frames copied onto flip chart paper. This should include sketches to show the shots and the action taking place. A short accompanying text should describe what is shown. The VNR should be well structured and make the main points clearly so that it could be used without editing if necessary.
- ▷ You will present your storyboard to the whole group.

Websites

- ◆ www.bnfl.com/website.nsf/default.htm, then go to 'Facts & issues'
- ◆ www.greenpeace.org.uk/contentlookup.cfm?SiteKeyParam=NUCLEAR1



Actionpage: Storyboard – Greenpeace

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You are part of Greenpeace's international communications team. Part of your responsibility is to maintain a video archive of material which can be used in your campaigns. You have your own in-house camera crew who accompany many of your direct action teams. You do not produce edited VNRs, but supply uncut footage to broadcasters. Much of this material has been used by broadcasters – this media coverage maintains Greenpeace's high profile and public awareness of environmental issues.

A report commissioned by Greenpeace and carried out by the University of Bremen indicates that the area around British Nuclear Fuels' (BNFL) Sellafield reprocessing plant is as heavily contaminated as the zone around the stricken Chernobyl reactor in Ukraine. This is an opportunity to draw attention to the hazards posed by the nuclear industry to health and the environment.

The main points :

- ◆ although BNFL's PR paints a rosy picture of a company at the forefront of technology, and that its operations pose no threat to health or environment, over the past 40 years there have been many accidents resulting in the leaking of radioactive materials
 - ◆ in October 1998 soil samples taken seven miles from the Sellafield plant indicate higher levels of the radioactive isotopes americium-241, caesium-137 and cobalt-60 than samples taken a similar distance from the destroyed Chernobyl reactor
 - ◆ americium is one of the most radiotoxic substances in the world; cobalt-60 can contaminate any life-form which comes into contact with it and can provoke cancer
 - ◆ in May 1998 divers from the Greenpeace ship, the Sirius, took samples of sea-bed sediments at the end of Sellafield's nuclear waste discharge pipe, at a depth of 20 metres, 2kms offshore; analysis by the University of Wales indicated that the sediment contains a mixture of dangerous radioactive isotopes at levels that would mean the site qualifies as a controlled nuclear waste dump under European Union (EU) regulations
 - ◆ BNFL is applying to the British government for permission to discharge 30bn litres of nuclear waste into the Irish Sea in the course of the next decade
 - ◆ radioactive contamination from Sellafield affects sea life as far as the Norwegian and Danish coasts; the level of radioactivity in some Irish Sea seafood is now 42 times higher than EU standards for contamination of food after a nuclear accident
 - ◆ BNFL is reprocessing spent nuclear fuel from reactors around the world; this results in the production of large amounts of deadly weapons-grade plutonium which has to be stockpiled because it has no commercial use.
- ▷ Produce a storyboard for about four minutes of footage, using a series of 4:3 frames copied onto flip chart paper. This should include sketches to show the shots and the action taking place. A short accompanying text should describe what is shown. The clips should make your main points clearly.
 - ▷ You will present your storyboard to the whole group.

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