



SPECIAL SESSION ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

SHORT NOTE

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: LET'S STAY IN TOUCH

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BULLET-POINTS ABSTRACT

- Science and society have a very strong link and we, as scientists, should consider how to improve our communication and dissemination skills to implement a positive feedback;
- New internet-based media provide an unprecedented opportunity to be give a significant contribution for all the scientists never involved in traditional communication;
- The public is variegated and unpredictable, but interested and curious: we can reach (and satisfy) a large audience with a relatively small effort
- The experience of Scientificast, Italian blog and podcast, is a successful example of new media exploitation for science communication, with thousands of people involved for each post or episode;
- We identified as keys for our success the involvement of young, motivated scientists with a well-defined target and style, a format that can be replicated, modified and improved by other groups.

KEYWORDS:

*Science Communication;
Podcast;
Blog;
New Media.*

Science and society have a stronger link than one can see at a first glance, and we do not mean “applied sciences”, whatever this can mean, but also “fundamental sciences”. This can be explained in both directions. Scientists get a significant part of their financing from public institutions, States, local administrations, EU et cetera, on one side, and this is quite evident: this also trigger a very common question, i.e. the infamous “what is this thing useful for?”. On the other side, society achieve a continuous improvement in the quality of life for citizens thanks to the advancement in technology boosted by scientific research. This link is perceived as looser than the other, and this is related to the poor communication from the scientific communities to the citizens: the importance of proper scientific communication for the general public has been recognised in several context and the effort to fill this gap is gaining momentum with increasing speed in the very last years. The parallel increase in importance of internet is opening new channels for scientific dissemination, parallel to the traditional ones. We all grew up (at least til my generation) watching TV and reading books or specialised press, when we wanted to approach science as “non experts”: both these activities were mainly performed by communication professionals with a strong science background and the support of scientists. Nowadays the challenge is to have the lar-

gest number of scientists involved in scientific communication, ready to give an interview, write a dissemination paper, produce a “content”, which can be audio, video, interactive and so on.

The focus, therefore, is moving from the communication professional to the scientist. What a scientist can do to play a succesful role in this game? I have gained some experience in the field thanks to Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, Pint of Science and specially Scientificast, this experience can be summarised in few points.

First of all, science is of interest for many unsuspectable people. Trying to make it accessible is definitely worth of. Many people will thank you for your efforts.

Never presume that something will be of no interest for the public. Scientificast had a broad success for blog posts concerning fundamental physics, number theory and the strangest topics. Also the usual consideration, “it is too complicated to be explained in a reasonable way for the general public should be avoided”.

This is the most critical aspect. A scientist is used to some jargon that is hardly comprehensible (when not “wrong”) to the public. Often he jumps into the core of the matter skipping a proper introduction, assuming that everyone has a knowledge background somehow comparable to the one he has. This is usually false and also the idea of being able to speak to anyone is false:

a scientist should always have in mind a target when he decides to communicate science. Usually a good compromise is thinking of people with a high school diploma, but this is not the only possible choice. There is an increasing interest in science communication and scientists' role in this activity is getting more

and more relevant: any scientist should consider to devote part of his time in science dissemination, exploiting all the communication media available nowadays.

Andrea Bersani is from Genova, where he works as technology scientist at Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare. Since 2013 he collaborates with Scientificast, one of the most relevant Italian scientific podcasts in Italy, both as a podcaster and as a blogger. He is a co-founder of Pint of Science Italia and has collaborated with Festival della Scienza, FameLab and other science dissemination initiatives.

