What's another word for *reprehensible?*

Republican message maven Frank Luntz is at it again. With GOP clients vulnerable (and deservedly so) for their anti-environmental actions, Luntz is giving them new language to hide behind: *conservationist* (instead of the more extreme sounding "environ- mentalist"), *climate change* (to cool down the heated rhetoric around global warming) and *balance* (because everyone knows big business deserves a fairer shake.) And as to advising Republicans to more seriously consider environmental concerns? No word on that from Mr. Luntz. ■

More Homes for Your Next Op-Ed

If you need help getting your op-eds placed, contact the Progressive Media Project (pmproj@progressive.org). Last year alone, PMP distributed 251 pieces and scored over 982 placements, including hits in major newspapers such as *The Detroit Free Press, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Houston Chronicle, Miami Herald,* and *San Jose Mercury News.* Organizations that have already benefited from this free service include the American Civil Liberties Union, NAACP, Human Rights Watch, The Ms. Foundation, Union of Concerned Scientists and many others both large and small.

Using the Knight Ridder/ Tribune News Service as its conduit to over 350

The PROGRESSIVE MEDIA PROJECT

newspapers nationwide, PMP distributes five or six op-eds a week, with each op-ed landing in an average of four newspapers. PMP also helps nonprofits by offering op-ed writing clinics at its offices in Madison, Wisconsin. To find out more, visit the group's website, www.progressivemediaproject.org. ■

free-range thinking™

APRIL 2003

Thinking Inside the Box

Communications campaign plan- ning is rarely an easy process. If the budget isn't too small, the deadline is too tight—and even on those rare occasions when both time and money are in sufficient supply, you still must answer some daunting ques- tions. Who is your primary target audi- ence? How do they see this issue, and how will you reach them with your message?

Fill in the boxes on the Smart Chart and you'll avoid one of the most commonly made mistakes in public interest communications.

In the heat of such planning, many nonprofits make a common mistake. "The tendency is always to start with tactics and work backward from there," says Kristen Wolf, President of Spitfire Strategies

and a twelve-year veteran of the public interest communication wars. "A group will tell me they want to hold a press conference in Washington when they really should be talking to the Mayor of Chicago. Unfortunately, holding the press conference becomes their goal, and they may reach that goal, but they didn't achieve what they really wanted: changing the mind of that mayor back in Chicago."

To help nonprofits and foundations stay focused, Wolf created the Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart for Commun- ications, a valuable new planning tool that proves thinking *inside* the box isn't always a bad thing.

► The Smart Chart is basically a grid with boxes to fill in *(a scaled-down version is enclosed)* but its value lays in the way it forces users to move from box to box, addressing communications planning questions in the order they should be addressed. To illustrate how you can use this tool, Wolf explains below how a current campaign run by The Justice Project flows smartly from this chart.

Section One: The 3 Guiding Points

The top section of the Smart Chart is comprised of three boxes for the three most important elements of a campaign plan:

· *Campaign Goal,* not to be confused with the organization's mission (although many nonprofits frequently make this mistake.) The operative question here: what are you hoping to achieve with this particular effort? The Justice Project is working to reform the capital punishment system, but for this campaign its immediate goal is to ensure access to DNA testing and competent counsel for anyone facing the death penalty.

· *Decision Makers,* the individuals who will be most instrumental in helping you achieve your goal. Campaigners at The Justice Project knew Congressional legislation would be required eventually, so members of the Judiciary Committees in the House and Senate were identified as the key decision makers.

· *Benchmarks of Success,* the milestones that indicate progress up to and including attainment of the goal. A documented increase in public support for access to DNA testing and competent counsel; endorsements from prosecutors, judges, and others inside the judicial system;

bipartisan support in Congress; and the introduction of a bill were the major benchmarks for this effort, with the passage of a bill as its culmination.

Section Two: Criteria to Consider

Now that you know where you're headed, complete this box to ensure your feet are still planted firmly on the ground. List the real-world considerations (budget, staff size, funder requirements, etc.) that must be taken into account as you map out the rest of this plan. For The Justice Project, these included a limited budget, certain lobbying restrictions, and research that said morality as a core message wouldn't work.

Section Three: Strategic Decisions

The largest part of the grid offers space to brainstorm about who your audience is, what beliefs they have that work for and against you, and how you can engage them in your effort. Essentially, it forces you to make five decisions (and provide the rationale for each) in the following categories:

· *Audience Target:* Who is the campaign trying to reach? List all the possibilities in this section, trying to be as specific as possible. The Justice project hoped to reach potential jurors, prosecutors, and judges, but the policy makers in Congress were clearly the number one target if new laws were to be written.

· *Values and Core Concerns:* What will motivate your target to act as desired? Usually, this means finding a core belief you can build on. Congressional policy makers didn't want to appear soft on crime, and

some supported the death penalty on moral grounds. There was also widespread concern, however, that innocent people were being wrongfully convicted. The Justice Project decided to focus on this concern, taking morality out of the argument and allowing lawmakers to remain "tough" on crime while looking more carefully at a flawed system.

· *Approach:* While the belief that innocent people were being executed provided an avenue into the hearts and minds of lawmakers, The Justice Project still had to decide how best to make its case. This came down to a choice between two approaches: identifying individuals (i.e., bad apples) who had made mistakes, or emphasizing flaws in the system. The group opted to focus on the system since the "bad apples" approach could have permitted a quick fix in which offending individuals were replaced while the system remained unchanged.

THE SPITFIRE STRATEGIES
SMART CHART FOR COMMUNICATIONS
A Tool to Help Nonprofits Make Smart Communications Choices

· *Message:* "The current system allows innocent people to be wrongfully convicted and executed" was the message that this process delivered to The Justice Project. Clearly, it could benefit from wordsmithing (as will most messages derived from this chart), but the important point is that this step-by-step process gave the group a strategically sound place to start.

· *Messenger(s):* "Who delivers your message is just as important as what you choose to say," Wolf asserts, and this final box provides space to consider candidates. The Justice Project considered exonerated prisoners and their defenders but ultimately selected prosecutors and judges (people on the other side of bad decisions) since the group felt they were more credible.

Thinking Inside the Box

The stay of execution issued by the Supreme Court on March 12, 2003 is the most recent example of a slow but significant shift in national attitudes towards capital punishment. The Justice Project is one of many groups contributing to that shift, and thoughtful communications planning has girded their efforts along the way. Spitfire Strategies' Smart Chart can bring the same level of thought and focus to your campaign planning.   To download a full-sized copy of the chart (along with a more detailed instruction booklet), visit www.spitfirestrategies.com. ■

CRITERIA TO CONSIDER	**1** GOAL		**2** DECISION MAKERS	**3** MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS	
•					
•					
•	**Decisions to Make**	**Choices**	**Decision**	**Rationale**	**Reality Check**
•	Audience target				Should not be general public or anything similar. Must be segmented. Should be the person/people who can most help you achieve your goal. Only when you figure out who this is, can you figure out how to reach them.
•					
•	Values and Core Concerns				It's easier to motivate someone around something they already believe in. What do they believe? Did you answer these two questions before choosing your audience: what do they believe that you can tap into, & what do they believe that you have to overcome?
•					
•					
•	Approach				Do not go straight to tactics. Consider big strategic decisions first. These will dictate tactics.
•					
•					
•					
•	Messaging / Message				Big difference between mission & message. Mission is what you are about. Message is about resonating with your audience based on their beliefs & values. Avoid MEGO phrases (my eyes glaze over). Focus not on the "what," but on the "so what."
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•	Messengers				People listen to people, not institutions. This is about who your audience can hear, who is credible to them. Sometimes you can have the right message but the wrong messenger delivering it. Result: fewer people listening to what you have to say.
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