



Is That a Humpback Whale in Your Pocket...?

The Center for Biological Diversity is transforming hundreds of thousands of cell phones into megaphones for its message.

A ringing cell phone can be annoying, but for Peter Galvin, it was inspiring. In late 2006, Galvin was having an otherwise unmemorable conversation with Monica Bond, a colleague at the Center for Biological Diversity, which Galvin co-founded. The talk turned to owls - a common occurrence at an organization dedicated to protecting endangered species - when an intern asked Bond if she could demonstrate the call of a spotted owl. Bond was happy to oblige, and that's when an interruption led to inspiration.

"She started to imitate the owl," Galvin recalls, "and at that exact moment, a cell phone rang nearby. I thought, *what if the cell phone sounded like a spotted owl?*" In a flash, Galvin envisioned an entirely new way to get people talking about his issue: ringtones made from recordings of owls and orcas, tree toads and humpback whales, and dozens of other endangered species.



By January 2009, over 240,000 ringtones had been downloaded from the [Center's website](#), transforming cell phones in over 150 countries into a different kind of conversation-starter. The unusual awareness campaign caught the attention of *The New York Times*, *Associated Press*, and *USA Today*, and has also been covered by India's national newspaper, *The Hindu*, and *The Guardian* of London. Galvin estimates that the Center's ringtones have generated over ten million dollars in earned media, and

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all of this publicity has come with an out-of-pocket price tag of zero.

The path from Galvin's initial ah-ha moment to nearly a quarter of a million downloads was not an entirely smooth one. When he first shared his idea with colleagues, "a few people said it was a dumb idea," Galvin notes. "They hated cell phones and asked why we wanted to associate ourselves with them at all." But Galvin knew he was on to something. "I told them: this is going to be the most important educational outreach effort you've ever worked on."

So he set about the task of collecting recordings, contacting colleagues and friends around the world. Many already had recordings in their files, and in December 2006, the Center for Biological Diversity posted two dozen audio files for free downloading under the banner "Rare Earthtones." Of course, as anyone who has ever offered free stuff on the Internet knows, posting the files is one thing. Creating demand is quite another.

"I started asking around," says Galvin, "to see who was writing about free ringtones." He sent emails to high profile tech writers such as David Pogue of *The New York Times*, but his first round of pitches drew no responses. Galvin and his staff persisted, however, and eventually got bites from *USA Today* and NPR's Morning Edition. They widened their outreach to include wildlife writers and endangered species bloggers, and this triggered more stories about the campaign. As each story appeared, the web site recorded a spike in downloads.

Galvin had hoped to see 25,000 downloads in the first year. There were 100,000, and they came from all over the globe, with the United Kingdom, China and Iran running second, third and fourth behind the U.S. The Mexican wolf and orca are the most popular recordings, which doesn't surprise Galvin. "Wolves and whales are at the top of the list of 'charismatic megafauna,' the creatures humans seem to have a special relationship with," he says. On his phone, Galvin carries the call of the boreal owl.

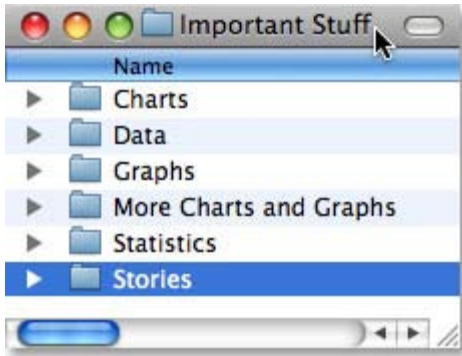
Beyond the number of downloads or estimated dollars in free media, it's difficult to precisely quantify the impact of this campaign. A phone rings, a few heads turn in curiosity at the odd sound, and the phone's owner explains, "It's a Rockhopper penguin. They're endangered." Does that ultimately translate into broader support for greater protection of endangered species? And some may argue that when the howls of endangered species emanate from the same place as snippets of Kanye West and Kelly Clarkson, the entire issue is trivialized.

But Galvin remains a believer, and when you consider the return on investment to date, it's hard to disagree. "The environment competes with a lot of other issues," he says, "so to the extent that these ringtones get people talking about biodiversity, they're important." And then Galvin pauses and his tone changes. "If we don't turn this disaster around," he says solemnly, referring to the rising tide of extinctions worldwide, "someday the *only* sounds of these critters could be ringtones. And that's a haunting thought for me."

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Storing Stories: How Do You Do It?

Seeking best practices in story-banking



When a storytelling culture begins to grow and flourish within an organization, its leaders will face a happy problem: keeping track of all the stories (new and old) that their colleagues have collected. In the August 2002 *free-range thinking*, I described how Families USA, which works to ensure access to quality affordable health

care, had organized literally hundreds of narratives in a well-indexed "story bank." ([Read the article.](#))

Since 2002, I have worked with many good causes that have become first-rate storytellers, but I haven't heard much about story *banking*. This void was brought home when I visited the Baltimore Community Foundation in January. Gigi Wirtz, the Director of Communications, asked me for some examples of good story-bankers, i.e., organizations that had not only collected good stories, but had a reliable system for finding the exact story they needed within their files. The best reply I could offer was, "Let me ask my readers!"

So, if you maintain a story bank yourselves or know of other organizations that do, [send me an email](#) and help me round up some of these best practices for a full report in a future newsletter. The state-of-the-art story bank you help build may one day be your own!

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What Kind of Presenter Are You?

And would you like to get better?

As the centerpiece of my research for the book, *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*, I surveyed 2,501 public interest professionals, asking them to talk candidly about presentations they see as well as those they give. When asked to rate themselves as presenters, the respondents clustered into five categories:

- **All-Stars** (18% of survey respondents): This group excels at all aspects of presenting from developing an initial outline to performing at the podium. This is no accident: while All-Stars may have some natural gifts, they have invested in formal training or read relevant publications (or both) to hone their skills.
- **Naturals** (20%): In basic skill level, this group resembles the All-Stars. They follow most of the principles that define good presentations, but this is a result more of intuition than formal training or independent study.
- **The Unplugged** (17%): At first glance, this third cluster resembles both the All-Stars and Naturals, but there's a key difference: the Unplugged generally work without visual materials (most notably, PowerPoint) when they present.
- **Draftees** (23%): The largest of the five categories, this group could also be called "The Coalition of the Unwilling." Draftees

give presentations because they have to. They have had little formal training to hone their skills and haven't read much about presenting on their own.

- **Jitterbugs** (17%): Members of this group have had little or no formal training and haven't studied presenting on their own. They know what they don't know, but being honest with themselves doesn't make them any more confident. To compensate, Jitterbugs are most likely to spend ample time rehearsing before they present, but this may only mean refining bad habits or getting more comfortable delivering bad content.

Can you place yourself in one of these groups? If you're an All-Star, congratulations! You can stop reading this article right now. But if you fall into one of the other categories, you could probably benefit from some training.

"Presentations: Bore No More"

is a two-hour webinar created to help you recognize and avoid the most common errors in presenting, create presentations that give the audience what it wants, and sharpen your skills at the podium. The Goodman Center will offer this class on February 19th and 26th from 11a-12n Pacific (2-3p Eastern) each day.

Tuition is \$250 and the class will be limited to 25 students. To find out more and register online, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.



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