

“How to Win Elections”

Like most Australians, Stefano Boscutti has watched in dismay as recent political campaigns have become mired in negativity, poor strategy and ill-advised communications.

Stefano Boscutti has advised many corporations on how to communicate more successfully with better ideas rather than bigger budgets, including ABC, Orica, Qantas, SBS and others.

Here are 44 things we've learned along the way that apply to the business of politics.

1. Universal truth. Communications is an art, not a science. People first make decisions emotionally which they then rationalise logically. Putting logic before emotions in any communications puts the cart before the horse. Voters across every demographic want what they've always wanted - love, acceptance, beauty, health, nutrition, community, social status, relief from suffering, transcendence. In politics this translates as jobs, income and national prosperity. Appeal to the public's self-interest, not yours.

2. Everything is communications. Advertising, public relations, corporate affairs, marketing, branding, design, etc. It's all communications. Every way your candidate and party interact with people is an opportunity to communicate successfully. Or not.

3. Party personality. Most parties lack any consistent personality from one year to another. This breeds scepticism and distrust. It's the personality that voters buy. Whoever dedicates their communications to building the most sharply defined personality for their candidate and party gets the most votes.

4. Most important decision. The effect of your communications depends more on this decision than any other: *How should you position your candidate and party?* The results of your campaign depend less on how we create your communications than on how your candidate and party are positioned.

5. Better promise. The second most important decision is this: *What should you promise voters?* A promise is not a claim or a theme or a slogan. It's a benefit, clear and simple. It pays to promise a benefit which is unique and competitive.



'Embody the big idea in a simple slogan that calls voters to action. Three or four syllables is plenty. Run it everywhere.' Stefano Boscutti

6. Big ideas. Unless your communications are built on a BIG IDEA, it will pass like a ship in the night. It takes a BIG IDEA to jolt people out of their indifference. To make them notice your communications, remember it and take action. BIG IDEAS are usually simple ideas. BIG SIMPLE IDEAS are not easy to come by. They require genius and midnight oil. A truly big one can change a country's fortunes.

7. How to recognise a big idea. According to Stefano Boscutti, it will help if you ask yourself these three questions:
- Did it make me gasp when I first saw it?
- Does it fit the strategy to perfection?
- Is it unique?

8. How Aristotle recognises a big idea. Ask yourself these three questions: *Is it lucid? Is it pleasing? Is it strange?*

9. Words make all the difference. There's a magnitude of difference between good and bad communications. John Caples has seen one advertisement sell 19 1/2 times as much as another. Same size, same image, same copy. Different headline. A handful of words can make all the difference between failure and success.

10. Medium is the message. Context is king. How your message appears says more than you think. When a party runs a rushed 30-second commercial on television, it appears panicked and distressed. At best it negates the message. At worst it triggers cognitive dissonance and seeds distrust. Rather than a scattergun approach, run longer and more confident commercials that help voters picture a better future.

11. Positively good. How do you stand out in a world of policy parity? Don't slam the competition, don't get down in the muck. Convince people that your brand is positively good.

12. High-quality. It pays to give candidates and parties an image of high-quality. Stefano Boscutti has been conspicuously successful in doing this for Apple, Ford, Levi's, Nike, Porsche, Qantas, SBS and others. If your communications look ugly, people will conclude that your candidate and party is shoddy, and they'll be less likely to vote for you.

13. Don't be a bore. Nobody was ever bored into paying attention. Yet most political communications are impersonal, detached, cold and dull. It pays to involve people. Don't show a hospital being constructed. Show patients being cared for.

14. Be first. Be a leader. Start political and policy trends instead of following them. Communications which follow a fashionable issue or are imitative is seldom successful. It pays to innovate, to blaze new trails. You'll be leading the way. You'll be seen as a leader. Onwards

15. Psychological segmentation. Any good communications agency knows how to position candidates and parties for demographic voter segments - for women, for old men, for farmers in Far North Queensland, etc. But we've learned it often pays to position for psychological segments.

16. Burr of singularity. Most communications slide off people's memories like water off a duck's back. Give your communications a flourish of singularity, a burr that will stick in people's mind. One such burr is the MNEMONIC DEVICE, or relevant symbol - like the triple drumstick logo we devised for Triple J.

17. Don't bury news. It's easier to interest voters in a policy when it's new than at any other point in its life. Many candidates and parties have a fatal instinct for burying news. This is why most communications for new policies fail to exploit the opportunity that genuine news provides. Launch your new policy with a loud BOOM!



Who needs a logo? Distilling communications to a single, powerful issue catapulted Margaret Thatcher and the conservatives to power with a parliamentary majority of 43 seats.

18. Go the whole hog. Most election communications campaigns are too complicated. They reflect a long list of objectives from well-intentioned committees. They embrace the divergent views of too many party officials. By attempting too many things, they achieve nothing. It pays to boil down your strategy to one simple promise - and go the whole hog in delivering that promise.

What works best in commercials

19. Avoid irrelevant celebrities. Either credible celebrities or real people can be effective.

20. Problem-solution. Above average in gaining attention. But don't use it unless you can do so without cheating.

21. Visual demonstrations. If they're honest, visual demonstrations are generally effective. It pays to visualize your promise. It saves time. It drives the promise home. It's memorable.



The New York Times dubbed "It's Morning Again in America" one of the most effective campaign spots ever.

22. Slice of life. These playlets are corny, but they've been known to get actors re-elected as President of the United States.

23. Show don't tell. What you show is more important than what you say. You can create great commercials without words.

24. On-camera voice. Commercials using on-camera voice do significantly better than commercials using voice-over.

25. Musical backgrounds. Musical backgrounds reduce recall of your commercial. Very few creatives accept this.

26. Stand-ups. The stand-up pitch can be effective if it's delivered with honesty.

27. Animation. Less persuasive than live commercials. Viewers cannot identify with the character in the cartoon.

28. Salvage commercials. Faults can be corrected. We've doubled the effectiveness of a commercial simply by re-editing it.

29. Grabbers. Commercials with an exciting opening hold audiences at a higher level than commercials which begin quietly.

What works best in headlines

30. Branded headlines. Five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. So if you don't include the candidate and party in your headline, you've wasted 80 percent of your money.

31. Benefit in headlines. Headlines that promise a benefit are more effective than those that don't.

32. News in headlines. Inject genuine news into headlines. People are always on the lookout for new perspectives.

33. Simple headlines. Telegraph what you want to say in clear, simple language.

34. How many words in a headline? In terms of recall, headlines between eight and ten words are most effective.

35. Localise headlines. In local communications, include the name of the city in your headline.

36. Select your prospects. When a policy is aimed at a special group, flag that group in your headline - ART LOVERS, WANT A NEW ART GALLERY?

What works best in copy

37. Yes, people read long copy. Readership drops very little between fifty and five hundred words. (This page contains 1,760 words, and you're still reading it.) Stefano Boscutti has used long copy with notable success - for Nike, Orica, ANZ, Qantas and others.

38. Story appeal in words. Stefano Boscutti has achieved notable results with copy structured as a story. People are naturally drawn to a narrative that puts them at the heart of a story.

What works best in design

39. Story appeal in photographs. Create photographs that suggest a story. Enough of a hint that people want to read the copy to find out what's going on.

40. Before & After. Any form of visualised contrast seems to work well. It reduces drama to its most elemental.

41. Photographs vs. artwork. Original photographs work better than drawings. Original photographs attract more readers.

42. Use captions. Twice as many people read the captions under the photographs as read the body copy.

43. Editorial layouts. Simple, non-fussy editorial layouts get higher readership than conventional advertisements.



Donald Trump trademarked the phrase "Make America Great Again" as his campaign slogan and rallying cry. But he wasn't the first to use it. Ronald Reagan used it in the 1980s. And Bill Clinton in the 1990s.

44. Simple brand assets. Create consistent, constantly-used, easy-to-remember brand assets which over time will create distinctive memory structures. These sensory and semantic cues will refresh and reinforce memory structures and keep your candidate and party top of mind.

'Rules are for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men.' Solon

Want to know more?

We believe in knowing what rules *are* - even though we may at times decide to break them.

That's why Stefano Boscutti has developed specialised information on creating winning communications for food products, travel destinations, financial services, media properties and other industries. It's for the education of our art directors, designers, copywriters and other creatives. And the benefit of our clients.

Stefano Boscutti

Want to make your election communications more successful? Stefano Boscutti has a comprehensive one-hour presentation on winning elections. If you'd like to see it, please email stef@boscutti.com