EX POST PAPER

Civil Society Empowerment Programme

The nine essentials to consider while engaging in online P/CVE campaigning

This paper offers nine essential tips and tricks on online campaigning. These essentials can be used by civil society organisations (CSOs) that aim to enter the realm of social media and the internet as part of their strategies in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). The essentials were collected at the CSEP Campaigns Event on 30–31 January in Brussels. This paper addresses particularly first-line practitioners and staff of CSOs who want to become better online campaigners. Get inspired. And please, join the CSEP network!

Becoming a better P/CVE Campaigner

Radical and extremist forces are highly active on the internet. Which is why more and more, CSOs involved in the P/CVE understand that they need to enter the online realm too.

January 2019, the CSEP Campaigns Event took place in Brussels (BE), flagging the start of 12 campaign projects that will promote alternative narratives and empower credible voices all over the European Union ([1]). Over 90 people met in Brussels, including representatives of the CSOs involved in the forthcoming campaigns, Member States representatives, and experts in the field of online communication, campaigning and social media. The participants enjoyed an energetic 2-day programme during which they learned how to become an effective online campaigner in the field of P/CVE.

Nine essential tips and tricks resulted from the event and are presented in this paper, targeting primarily CSO staff and first-line practitioners working on a Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) campaign project. The nine essentials cover the early, initial stage of online campaigning and might help you to answer the question: how can I become a better campaigner?

9 Essentials for Online P/CVE Campaigners
1. Find out what is happening online
2. Define who you are online (and where)
3. Use GAMMMA to develop your strategy.
4. Know your audience
5. Get creative
6. Start monitoring today!
7. Use the features and resources of the platforms
8. Stay safe and do no harm
9. Join the CSEP network!

Essential 1: Find out what is happening online

Ask yourself **what is happening online** in terms of polarisation and radicalisation towards violent extremism. Do you know sufficiently how the internet and social media actually "work"? Do you understand how both offline and online causes contribute to the process of someone's radicalisation? Can you envisage your role in these dynamics? Before you start, start with the basics:

▪ Grasp the root causes of violent extremism;
▪ Identify the online extremism you want to fight;

([1]) Under CSEP, and as part of the EU Internet Forum, the European Commission funds campaign projects to promote alternative narratives and to empower credible voices. Currently, the projects involve over 70 project partners from around the EU, namely Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and the Netherlands. More projects will follow in the course of 2019, thereby continuously growing the CSEP network.

- Find out what P/CVE campaigning is.

Grasp the root causes of violent extremism

In the orientation phase of your campaign development, you might need a better understanding of the **root causes of violent extremism**. If your campaign aims at changing your target audience's behaviour, you will have to understand the constituting factors behind this behaviour. An exhaustive body of relevant research on this issue has been produced by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) working groups and RAN experts. A very good basic introduction is offered by Magnus Ranstorp, according to whom violent extremism can be best conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations ([2]). There are some basic primary "colours" that create complex interlocking combinations. It is the combined interplay of these factors that causes violent extremism.

Individual sociopsychological factors	Other factors that are a motor for radicalisation
Social factors Political factors Ideological and religious dimensions Culture and identity issues Trauma and other trigger mechanisms	Group dynamics Radicalisers/groomers Social media

Identify the online extremism you want to fight

Map the online environment you want to enter. Try and find out who you will be fighting. **Who** is out there currently? **How** do they interact and influence each other? **Who** is playing a role in the distribution of extremist or violent propaganda? **What** is their narrative? **Where** can you find them? And **why** are these actors active online? **What** is their purpose and their objective? **Why** does your target audience feel attracted by these influencers and the ideas they share on the internet and via social media? At the CSEP Campaigns Event, an actual and concise update of extremist online propaganda was provided by the VOX-Pol Network of Excellence. This presentation may serve as a good point of departure while getting a general picture of extremism online.

([2]) Ranstorp, M., The root causes of violent extremism, RAN Issue Paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

Learn what P/CVE campaigning is

For your activity to constitute a campaign, it must be organised, active and focused on a goal. The RAN Communication and Narratives Working Group (C&N) produced enlightening videos that offer a good introduction on what P/CVE campaigning is. The C&N also wrote papers that might provide you with inspiration and technical guidance while developing your own alternative narratives and counter-narratives. A prerequisite for thinking about counter-narratives is to deconstruct the basic elements and to ask yourself: **What** is attractive about these narratives in the first place? **How** are these narratives constructed, framed and projected? **What** is the role of emotions and ideology? **What** is the relationship between on- and offline behaviour?

> **LEARN MORE**
> Find the VOX-Pol presentation attached to this paper and more VOX-Pol research insights here.
> The videos on what P/CVE campaigning is can be seen on YouTube and the RAN website.
> More RAN publications on causes of violent extremism can be found on the RAN website.

Essential 2: Define who you are online (and where)

Consider your online role and how others will approach you online. What criteria will define whether you can play a significant online role? What are **your chances to influence** or even change the thoughts or behaviour of the people you aim to encounter while campaigning? What is **your strategy** in changing your target audience's behaviour? Lessons from the CSEP Campaigns Event include:

- Go hyperlocal
- Become a digital activist

Go hyperlocal

You want to provide lasting change. The biggest risk while engaging in a P/CVE campaign is lack of focus and thus effectiveness. Which is why you have to connect to the social ecology of your target audience. Meaning: become part of their daily environment, both online and offline. The internet may be global, but you and your campaign must go hyperlocal. Jonathan Russell of Breakthrough Media says going hyperlocal means you understand that:

- knowing your **audience** is essential,
- **place** is important,
- **targeting** is important,
- **extremists** go hyperlocal.

Become a digital activist

According to Sabine Beck, campaigner at Greenpeace, digital activism is a prerequisite to have relevance in the real world now and also in the future. Virtual and analogue worlds are no longer separated. We cannot withdraw from the virtual world. Beck says digital no-go areas must be reconquered for our democratic discourse. Digital activism helps to push your offline efforts to reach a larger public, to fight off influencers who promote violent extremist ideas and to rescue people who are under attack by extremists. From the Greenpeace experience in campaigning we can learn how to become digitally active effectively: online campaigning implies **doing things together**. It is not a one-time top-down communication effort, but a **long-term interactive dialogue** between you and your organisation and the people you have an interest in. Beck says it is about "becoming the crowd". And it can start as easily as by running a small Twitter group to get the message going.
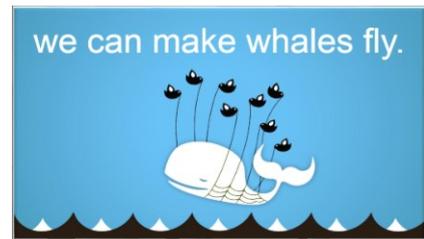
> **LEARN MORE**
> Find the Greenpeace presentation attached to this paper.
> Find the presentation by Jonathan Russell (Breakthrough Media) attached to this paper.

Essential 3: Use GAMMMA to develop your strategy

RAN's C&N has developed practical guidelines for carrying out effective alternative and counter-narrative campaigns. These guidelines have been made tangible in the GAMMMA+ model, comprising the following key elements: **Goal, Audience, Message, Messenger, Media, Action** plus **Monitoring and Evaluation**.
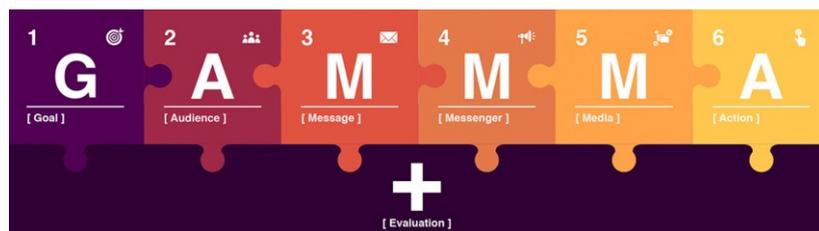
GAMMMA+ guidelines that could be particularly helpful for the forthcoming CSEP projects:

- Effective communication campaigns have **goals** that are clear, **realistic** and measurable.
- Promoted messages are relevant and the target audience considers the **messengers credible**.
- Do not create narrative campaigns in the form of monologues. These are unlikely to **meet the needs of an audience** that wants to talk or is upset or outraged about a real or perceived injustice.
- Campaigns should offer a **call to action** for those wishing to become involved in the issue at hand.
- Campaigns aiming to change minds and behaviours offer opportunity for **sustained dialogue** (both online and offline) with those in their audience who wish to talk.
- Campaigns that produce a **constant stream of content** for their target audience to interact with increase their chances of having an impact.
- **Authenticity** and quantity are more relevant than technical quality.

Essential 4: Know your audience

The GAMMMA model requires you to think about, among many other things, your target audience. At the CSEP Event, the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) presented useful approaches for **identifying the people you want to reach**. While researching your target audience, you might consider three questions:

1. Who **are** they?
2. What do they currently **think** and **feel**?
3. Why do they **act** like they do?

In particular, the third question is quintessential (the big WHY), in accordance with **behavioural change theory** that is often followed in campaigning strategies. After you have identified the attitudes and behaviours you want to change, you will need to know what influences and drives your target audience. This will allow you to appeal to the right **needs, benefits, motivations, grievances** and **vulnerabilities**.

Essential 5: Get creative

Every campaign needs **content**. You will have to create content that attracts your target audience. The online space is full of content that is very attractive for your audience. These simple statements point at a very difficult part of your campaigning work. How will you come up with content that is being appreciated by your audience while there is so much on offer simultaneously? Like Luke Newbold stated at the CSEP Event, you are now entering their communications environment and are one among many. If you want to change their attitudes or behaviours in some way, you will need to stand

are one among many. If you want to change their attitudes or behaviours in some way, you will need to stand out with your creativity, **grab their attention amid the noise**. You will need to be entertaining, inspirational, informative, disruptive. And you will need to tap into their social biases. The following might help:

- The WIIFM question – What's in it for me?
- Build a content reservoir
- Try and test and try again.
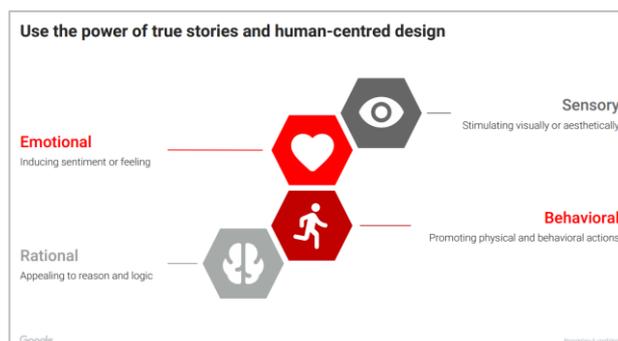
The WIIFM question – What's in it for me?

When you create content yourself, be aware of the **basic rules:**

1. Consider **for whom** you are making the content. It is not what you like that will suit your audience most. It is what your audience likes that you must adjust your content to.
2. Do understand that serious messages are absorbed best when served in an **easy-to-digest manner**. Loss of information density can be compensated by a higher degree of the target audience's capacity of information intake. For instance, online videos might contain possibly less factual information, but are easier understood and consumed by many than, for example, PDF text files are.
3. What will make content attractive? Luke Newbold of Lens Change suggests that your audience will always and immediately ask itself the WIIFM Question: What's In It For Me? Your content will be considered attractive when it has **purpose, beauty, wonder, curiosity, emotion** and/or a **connection**.
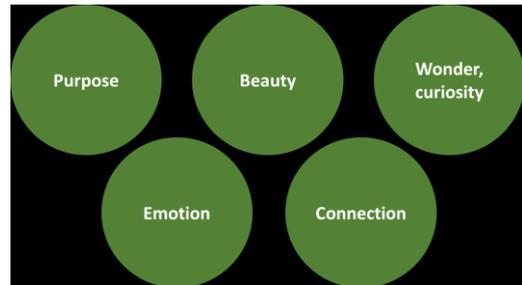
Build a content reservoir

Build a content reservoir. Here, you store content that can be used while running your campaign. Part of the content might be original, created and produced by your organisation with the particular aim of using it for your campaign(s). Yet, much material can be found on the internet and/or obtained from partner organisations, like the organisations in the CSEP network. This **third-party relevant content** costs less but it has value for your campaign as well!

Try and test and try again

Start experimenting as soon as possible. Facebook likes to provoke campaigners to start doing things by using slogans such as **Fail harder** and **Done is better than perfect**. Luke Newbold encouraged participants in his workshop at the CSEP Event to try things and test and try again. Don't talk too long about what you would like to do, just do it – and see whether it works. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Always. This counts for many aspects of your campaign: the **right choice of the social media platform**, the **look and feel** of the content, the **tone of voice** of the text, the **messenger** that you recruit. **Determine** whether these aspects appeal to your audience, **if they** fit in with their ideas about what is cool and what is not. There are at least three ways to find out:

1. **Run focus groups** to get to know your audience.
2. **Test the water**. Develop various versions of your campaign, differing in, for example, style and choice of platform. See which version evokes most response and which response is most in line with your campaign's purpose.
3. **Acknowledge there is no magic answer**. You will have to find out what will work for your target audience every time again.

READ MORE
You will find the presentation by Luke Newbold attached to this paper.

Essential 6: Start monitoring today!

Campaigns that ensure they have monitoring and evaluation components in place from the start can then **adjust ongoing activities if needed**, and, once completed, can learn whether they had the desired impact. You need to prepare your monitoring and evaluation protocol carefully and start doing this long before you are actually online. Why? Because you cannot campaign or talk about **success or failure of your campaign** if you don't know what you want to achieve with your efforts and what success means for the campaign. You could consider following these steps in your monitoring.

Spend on TIME: **Test, Iterate, Monitor, Evaluate**. Have this ready before everything else, otherwise you won't do it afterwards. Campaigners tend to spend 10% of their total campaign budget on the TIME process. Such an investment is worth it to bring costs down for future campaigns. To make TIME work, empower the evaluation person to ask difficult questions. This may also provide you with useful benchmarks for richer evaluation data later!

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Testing

- Can you test ideas with the target audience at an early stage?
- Can you run focus groups to test your creative routes with the target audience?
- Can you run a beta phase of the campaign with A/B versions?
- Have you tried different words for your key messages?
- Have you tried different colours or formats?
- Have you tried different calls to action?

Iterating

- Insights from testing phase are just as important as the research phase.
- Don't be afraid to make evidence-based changes.
- If you knew exactly how it was going to go, what would be the point?
- Build iteration into your budget and timelines.
- Don't fall into the trap of seeing everything as a pilot campaign. You can iterate during the same phase.
- Be a learning organisation or consortium.

Monitoring

- Do you know **what** you are looking for?
- Set some **key performance indicators**.
- Ask **"so what?"** for every bit of data you collect.
- Collect **as much data** as you can. It may be useful later.
- Start the monitoring **before you start** your campaign. Set baselines.
- Do you have an explanation or **hypothesis for every change** in performance?
- **Write down what you see**, and your assumptions or conclusions. Revisit them and do this regularly.

Evaluation

What we might learn from professional marketeers is how to apply the PAR[3] model in campaign evaluation. PAR[3] refers to **five indicators** that you could take into account while developing your evaluation protocol. How will you measure progress in your campaign regarding:

1. performance
2. awareness
3. resonance
4. resilience
5. return on investment?

> **READ MORE**
> More on TIME and PAR[3] is available in the presentation by Jonathan Russell (Breakthrough Media).
> More on monitoring and effect measurement is available in the ESCN presentation.

Essential 7: Use the features and resources of the platforms

Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube: every platform has specific requirements as well as specific opportunities for content creation. Check their online tutorials! All social media platforms offer a wide variety of features and resources for campaigning. Some of these features and resources are made for commercial enterprises and CSOs alike, while others are designed especially for use by not-for-profit initiatives. For instance, consider using the paid ad feature on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube as part of your campaign. These services can help you to target your audience far beyond your "natural reach" (friends and friends of your friends). Furthermore, check the following tutorials and handbooks or the RAN website for more relevant guides.

> **READ MORE**
> For Twitter, check for example marketing.twitter.com (campaign case studies) and media.twitter.com.
> For Facebook, check for instance https://counterspeech.fb.com/en/.
> For Google or YouTube, check for example
> How to enhance and protect your online campaign
> How to identify trends and compare topics
> How to use YouTube for Campaigns.

Essential 8: Stay safe and do no harm

Stay safe!

Campaigning on socially sensitive matters may cause lots of response. Actually, it is response you are looking for. Yet, not all responses are wanted and, unfortunately, you might expect to receive a lot of unpleasant, verbally aggressive and intimidating reactions to your online activities (**hate speech**). Sometimes you may even encounter the danger of physical threats. How can you deal with this **unwanted response**?

All social media platforms maintain **rules, terms and conditions** in order to keep you safe while online. See for instance the Twitter one-pager in the attachment to this paper, summarising what you can do when you're not feeling at ease while campaigning online. Social media platforms are improving almost on a daily basis in detecting and removing hate speech and extremist content, but in the meanwhile and, in general, this is what you can do when confronted with threats online:

- **Respond.** Requires good preparation and an assessment in terms of the goal of your campaign: will responding contribute to realising your aims? Is the sender of the message a member of your target audience or its surroundings?
- **Report online.** All platforms have an active policy regarding hate speech and violent extremist/terrorist content (community standards).
- **Ignore.** Doing nothing might make the sender's contribution irrelevant.
- **Hide.** Option that allows you to make the post invisible for others with the exception of yourself and the one who posted. He/she will continue thinking their contribution is still seen by others.
- **Block, delete.** You will make it impossible for the person to leave future posts on your page.
- **Report offline.** In addition to reporting online, when a threat seems to be getting closer to manifesting itself in the physical world, national law applies and in relevant cases, contact the police. Having a strategy for risk might help you in deciding when to take action.
- **Don't read your hate mail daily.** Your mental resilience to negative messages might become weakened.
- **Discuss and share.** One way to mentally deal with these messages is by discussing it with your peers. Letting off steam or discussing your emotions regarding negative content will help.

Do no harm

Studies have shown that making people, youths in particular, aware of something that authorities consider bad for them might make them interested in an issue that they hadn't previously been interested in. While this is less of a concern for alternative messages, highlighting how bad and dangerous specific extremist or terrorist groups are could have a counterproductive effect. Counter-narratives should therefore be much more targeted and should aim at people who are curious about extremist content or sympathise with it already. **Look for the unintended consequences of your actions.**

READ MORE
To test and improve your online security and safety measures, check for instance: Phishing Quiz, 2-Step Verification, Advanced Protection Program, HTTPS.

Essential 9: Join the CSEP network!

Through the CSEP, the EU is committed to capacity building, training, partnering CSOs with internet and social media companies, and supporting campaigns designed to reach vulnerable individuals and those at risk of radicalisation and recruitment by extremists.

If you are a CSO of some kind that has the potential to provide a credible voice for counter- or alternative narrative campaigns, the CSEP is for you. You might be a teacher, a youth or community worker, or work for an interfaith or neighbourhood project, or maybe you work for a charity or NGO. You need to have a track record in delivering counter- or alternative narratives, but not necessarily online. We would also like to hear from marketing and communications experts as well as creative companies. Join the Civil Society Empowerment Programme network!

The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) has been tasked by DG Migration and Home Affairs to organise the event, with the support of the CSEP partners Facebook, Google, Twitter, European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) and VOX-Pol.