We're Engaged!

Before this show even aired, we knew we wanted to check in with Andrew Cousins, who recently had a story air on WHYY in Philadelphia about the invisible art of getting people to talk to us. We also wanted to find out what he's learned about engaging people since the pandemic.

Andrew kindly agreed to sit down with us and answer our questions about WHYY's engagement work—which started long before the pandemic—and what he's learned about engaging a community in crisis.

We're excited to share this episode with you. And if you want a break from coronavirus news, experience Dr. Seuss with a Dr. Dre version of “Hop on Pop”.

QOTD: 'Engagement is the long game. It’s a skill and a practice. And if you want to be good at it, you have to translate it. A website landing page may not make sense; you might have to translate them. A newsletter that can be tailored for any size organization. A Facebook group...'

Resources:

America Amplified Engagement Advisory Board

Reader revenue in the wake of COVID-19.

In a video on April 10, 2020, Andrew Cousins talks about how WHYY in Philadelphia has been working to build “cultural capital” in the community. "What's the cultural capital?" he asks. "It's nothing fancy, but it's how you continue to do a great job, year after year. It's like getting people to see you as a human being and not just some random organization that someone came up with." He goes on to share stories about his experience engaging the community while producing a listening diary of Andrew Cousins.

As part of our project, reporters have been trying to tell a local story better than the local journalists on the ground. Clearly explain why you are doing this story at the top of the interview. Be open about your story idea. This is what Andrew did.

He stood up and grabbed a Harry Potter keychain that a friend, who passed away in 2019, gave him. "Ah, what?" Andrew said. "He stood up and grabbed a Harry Potter keychain. It was a sign from him that he was with me." Andrew then reached for his coffee mug. "I recorded them from my home. During our first interview, I reached for my coffee mug, and I heard my friend's voice. I knew he was with me."

Getting people to leave voicemails with their stories can be hard work, but it's worth it. Andrew has some tips:

1. Have your team do voicemail outreach. It's easier when you have the whole team involved.
2. Ask reporters to call people who aren't going to be guests on the show. Ask reporters to reach out to people who are engaging with the audience in other ways. It's a great way to get people involved in the process.
3. Ask people to leave stories on your answering machine. "If you're not getting stories, try leaving voicemails on your answering machine," Andrew suggests. "People will leave stories on your answering machine."

If not, you definitely should convince your local journalists to give your station to carry it! :-)

TODAY'S TIP:

If you have a distribution strategy, you can use it to drive engagement. If you don’t have one, you might want to start thinking about one.

You might want to start thinking about partnering with an organization that already has a distribution strategy. "If you have a distribution strategy, you can use it to drive engagement," Andrew suggests.

What information does the community need? Start with a fundamental question:

What is the underlying need of your community?

If you have a community event or newsletter, you can ask people to sign up for it. "This is your chance to ask people to sign up for your community event or newsletter," Andrew suggests.

Think about a relevant distribution plan.

Think about what time of day, what day of the week, or what time of year you want to distribute your message.

Some tips for distribution:

1. Think about a relevant distribution plan. You might want to use social media to distribute your message.
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Commit and follow through.

The station newsletter, over the air promos to solicit engagement, and a single question that comes from the community during the pandemic. Through the pandemic's impact on the elderly (especially in nursing homes) and how the country is getting back to normal.

Hearken consultant Bridget Thoreson will join America Amplified reporters on May 15 for a moderated group conversation on how communities can build trust.

Our second week, hosted by Brian Ellison, featured stories of mental health in rural America.

Our third week, hosted by Karen Weintraub, moved the conversation to the Canadian experience in managing the pandemic.

England Public Media, covered the May 2nd episode of "Life, Community, and COVID-19" on the vulnerable elderly. Our coordinating producer Andrea Tudhope (who also produced the show). Register here.

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Click here for more info.