In today’s competitive world, organisations are constantly seeking new and better ways to connect message to audience, and get the desired result. And in today’s technological age, there has to be a social or digital magic bullet that can do the job: better, cheaper, faster. On its own and in one simple hit. Right? Well, not quite.

Creative consultancies are constantly challenged by their clients to find that social or digital magic bullet because finding it would be terrific. Without print, production costs would go down. Inherent trackability means the ability to measure would go up. Complex channel and media strategies would become simpler. And communications would become as effective as a heat-seeking missile.
But there is a magic bullet and it’s staring you in the face. It’s not new, in fact in its current form it’s around 200,000 years old. It’s far better at guessing your preferred alternative purchases online and its personality shines through in social media. It’s your people. Because when all has been said and done, face-to-face is your most effective communications channel. Other forms of communication, new or otherwise, are simply a substitute for it. The most effective forms of communication do the best job of shortening the distance between your people and your audience.

If you’re in any doubt then consider a recent study by Professor Dunbar at Oxford University. Comparing face-to-face conversations with Skype, ‘phone, e-mail, texting and other social media, face-to-face came up trumps, but Skype far outperformed any other technology as a ‘satisfying’ social medium. Another study showed that in two-fifths of cases face-to-face meetings were what converted prospects to new customers, while an estimated quarter of clients would take their accounts elsewhere without regular face-to-face meetings.

We’re still primed to interact as Stone Age people did around the campfire. Virtual face-time replicates many of those elements: a sense of place, context, immediacy and intimacy that other media deny us:

- face-time gives a clear and instant sense of visual identity
- body language and facial gestures can reveal messages that words conceal
- real-time chat gives an accurate feel for how people are responding based on timing and tone
- it’s far easier to build trust if you can (literally) see eye-to-eye
- Above all, character and humour can shine through
Dunbar’s research concludes that, of all the elements that made face-to-face interactions work better, “laughter turned out to be the key”.

This is all great theory but it isn’t quite the answer. So back to the real world and how can all this be translated into a solution to optimise your brand and marketing approach?

Social media is effective beyond the boundaries of the consumer world. Not simply as a place to deposit your latest press release but a place to reveal your ‘corporate’ soul. Which means you need to have one. So capture your messaging, build on your existing strengths, build in your ambitions and articulate what it is you really stand for. Then use Twitter and LinkedIn to showcase it, from formal results, to informal behind the scenes activity that demonstrates beyond the corporate speak, what you’re like to deal with. Because once clients know what you can do, what you’re like is what they buy.

Getting the messaging right is one step towards getting your brand right. Tone of voice isn’t a silly invention from Marketing, it’s a really effective means of humanising your content and taking it beyond the voice of the corporate Stepford Wife. Embed the human touch in your visual brand by developing a visual approach that makes it clear your audience is dealing with a group of people with a shared ethos, not just a corporate whole. And there are a hundred more compelling ways of doing this than ‘people stock shots’.

And pull all of this through the complex blend of online and offline communications you produce – from bid reports to Twitter. The emergence of social media and the increasing sophistication of digital media doesn’t make communicating easier, it makes it more complex and the job of communications, and marketing professionals has never been harder. But by giving you more places to be heard rather than fewer, it’s worth the effort.
Ultimately, your magic bullet is your magic stars: your people. Work out what you stand for, recruit and develop your people around that, develop a rich tapestry of communications that shortens the distance between your audience and them. There. It is simple after all.

Chew over your magic stars and call us for a consuming discussion:

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Frank, Bright & Abel is a creative communications consultancy, providing strategy, design and delivery to higher education, business-to-business and financial services.