

Paralel session 19: Scientists and science institutions as PCST agents: experiences?

UABDivulg@: A NEW CHANNEL TO BRING RESEARCH TO SOCIETY

Octavi López Coronado

Àrea de Comunicació i de Promoció. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 08193 Cerdanyola del Vallès. Ph: +34-93-581-33-01, E-mail: octavi.lopez@uab.es

Abstract

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona generates a large quantity of research results and knowledge on experimental and social sciences. More than 1000 research papers and nearly 300 PhD Thesis per year are produced at the UAB. Few of them, just some of the most relevant results, are published widely by means of press releases and reaches the general public. In order to fill the gap between press releases and research papers and increase the rate of research activities that reach society, UAB has added to its science communication programme a new communication channel: the web site UABDivulg@ (www.uab.es/uabdivulga). The site brings scientists the opportunity to publish at their own rhythm their research results and projects, in a comprehensible level to the general public.

Key Words: institutional science communication, internet

Text

Context

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), as a research institution, generates a large quantity of research results and knowledge on experimental and social sciences. As many others do, this institution brings some of these results to the general public by means of sending press releases to the media and publishing articles in the house organ and in the institutional web site (www.uab.es) [O.López-Coronado & A. Reig i Malla, 2001]. These activities are being done with relative success. But just some of the most relevant discoveries (from the social impact point of view) can be released to the general public in this way. This implies that just a very few percentage of the research produced at the University has a established way to reach the general public. Therefore, there is a gap between press releases and scientific papers in the established science communication channels.

Objective

Science communication programme at the UAB now includes a new communication channel that fills this gap between press releases and scientific papers: the web site UABDivulg@. The aim of this web site is to bring scientists systematically the opportunity to publish at their own rhythm their research results and projects, despite of its social impact or relevance, in a comprehensible level to

the general public. The web site has been designed as an information source for science journalists, scientists, institutions, enterprises, and also as a tool for educational purposes.

Methods

In order to accomplish the main objective of bringing the opportunity to every research to be published in a comprehensive level, despite of its social impact or relevance, we have tried to optimize every step in the process:

1. Getting as much information as possible. It is taken into account almost all the scientific production from the University: research articles in scientific journals, PhD thesis, approved research projects, books and chapters, etc.
2. Asking everyone to write a comprehensible article. There is no filtering in the process. Every researcher gets a general invitation to participate in this project, and everyone of them is asked again whenever he publishes a research article, gets a new project, etc. Researchers are also asked for complementary images or links.
3. Writing a very comprehensible introduction. Staff from the Public Information Office, with science communication skills, writes a brief and very comprehensible introduction to every article and prepares a pre-publication in the www.
4. Review process. Trying to make UABDivulg@ as rigorous as possible, researchers receive a pre-publication access to the article, in order to review it and give their approval to its publication.

Results

The primary source of information is guaranteed, due to the high numbers in research papers and PhD thesis at UAB, but the rate of participation of the researchers in communication activities can still be increased. From May to November 2003, we have had access to about 550 research results, PhD thesis and new projects. In every case, the principal investigator has been asked for an article to be published at UABDivulg@. In this period UABDivulg@ has received about 110 articles for publication. This means that, in its 6 first months, UABDivulg@ has achieved an average rate of participation of 20%, i.e. about 15 contributions per month. This guarantees the future feasibility of the project. Promotion of the site and evaluation of how it is reaching the public are the main future projects.

Beyond the interest of this initiative as a way to communicate scientific research to society, we find UABDivulg@ a powerful tool for further objective studies about scientific community participation in science communication activities. Also, due to the easy tools that electronic media brings to evaluate their audience, it will be very interesting to study public preferences and behaviours on institutional science communication.

Conclusion

We have developed a new web site, UABDivulg@, as an information source for the general public. The site brings scientists the opportunity to publish at their own rhythm their research results and projects, in a comprehensible level, in order to increase the rate of research activities that reach society. In this site, all the contributions are written directly by the researchers. It has been achieved a rate of participation of about 15 new contributions per month, which guarantees the future feasibility of this initiative.

References

O.López-Coronado & A. Reig i Malla, *Comunicación Científica desde el Gabinete de Prensa de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, II Congreso de Comunicación Social de la Ciencia, Valencia, 28-30 de noviembre de 2001.

