

Fundamentals of Effective Weather Communication for Broadcast Meteorologists

Television audience research conducted in early 2019 by the media consulting firm Magid showed that 81% of those who watch local news say they already know the forecast. And 87% think the weather broadcast is virtually the same on all TV stations. This perception creates a real challenge. If broadcast meteorologists want to stay relevant, they need to find new ways to communicate daily weather information more effectively. Over a 35-year career as a broadcast meteorologist, I found that developing a method that incorporates meteorology and message was paramount, along with a third more unconventional approach: marketing.

But first, work on the meteorology. If the forecast isn't accurate, nothing else matters. Broadcast meteorologists must insure the information they share is correct, specific, and timely.

An accurate forecast is futile, however, if the viewer doesn't remember the details. Broadcast meteorologists can help people understand and recall the forecast by editing the meteorology into three or four messages that explain the mechanics of the weather, add detail, and provide context. The messages become the theme for everything the broadcast meteorologist produces.

Finally, broadcast meteorologists should consider how to communicate the message on-air, online, and on social media. Just putting the information out there isn't enough, as the research shows. Broadcast meteorologists need to produce and publish with a purpose. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as "communicating, delivering, exchanging offerings that have value for customers...and society at large."

This isn't about self-promotion. And this isn't about selling or hyping the weather. Marketing is connecting with viewers on an intellectual, emotional, and visceral level by providing the information they need and want in a format they can understand and appreciate.

Communicating complex meteorological data to the general public can be challenging. The public demands detailed, specific, up-to-the-minute information. Broadcast meteorologists can establish themselves as trusted sources of weather information by effectively communicating on every platform, every time. There is a natural connection between meteorology and marketing. When done right, marketing helps people. That's the essence of what broadcast meteorologists do every day.—TIM HELLER (HellerWeather, LLC), "Fundamentals of effective weather communication" presented at the 47th Conference on Broadcast Meteorology, 12–14 June 2019, San Diego, California. ●



Marketing Weather Mechanics.
The author explaining the "cap" on-air at KTRK ABC13 in Houston, Texas.

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