AS IN PREVIOUS Research Framework Programmes, the EC is clear that activities to disseminate information and exploit research results will play an integral part in Horizon 2020 (H2020). A well thought through and fully costed dissemination plan is essential not only for a successful project, but also for a successful project proposal: it is now given almost as much weighting as the quality of research itself.

Having now been involved in a number of project bids, I have been startled by how many dissemination plans use very basic templates. There is a strong tendency to lean towards tried and tested methods of dissemination, whereby dissemination equals a speaker slot at a conference, a journal publication, and little more. While I would agree that traditional dissemination methods are well tried, their impact is arguably less tested. At a conference or within a journal, a researcher is reaching his peer group – subject specialists, largely within academia. So what becomes of that wider impact, and the need within H2020 projects to reach policy, industry and the public?

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND H2020
The ‘grand challenge’ supported by H2020 funding has strong economic and societal underpinnings. There is an expectation that research is being funded to support economic recovery and growth, as well as a sustainable society. The impacts of this cannot be fully assessed by an academic audience – therefore researchers and research consortia need to find different ways to engage.

Beyond the basics of communications theory (ie segmenting your audience, developing targeted messaging and measuring success), the challenge that H2020 throws to the research community is arguably one that should be embraced more widely. Conferences and journals are vital communication channels for a scholarly audience, but these must be supported by dissemination efforts across new media to reach new audiences – thus breaking down barriers to accessibility, and demonstrating real pay-back to society.

LET EXPERTS MANAGE YOUR DISSEMINATION PLAN
At Research Media, we work with researchers to communicate their message via a range of media, and are finding increasing demand for visual and audio-visual communication tools. Infographics are hugely popular; illustration creates uniqueness; and animation creates dynamism and interactivity. All of these tools present different ways to tell your story in order to reach different audiences – whether they be policy makers who are time-poor, industry experts who want to take your idea to market, or a lay public who want to achieve a basic understanding of the research their tax is funding.

These newer media channels need alternative metrics to assess value and impact – downloads, views, shares, likes, inbound enquiries, and so on. However, they also enable you to reach an audience beyond traditional networks. Is it expensive? As the EC themselves suggest, the key is building the costs into your initial proposal, working with an expert dissemination and communications agency who can advise you – there are a number of potential partners out there, ourselves included. This means that you get to concentrate on the science, and leave someone else to do the shouting for you.

SCI-COMM SPOTLIGHT:
LOST IN THE WOODS?
TIPS FOR A BETTER HORIZON 2020 DISSEMINATION PLAN

If a researcher explains the relevance of their research in a forest and nobody hears, will they still get Horizon 2020 funding? Research Media’s CEO Vicky Williams explains how creativity when approaching your dissemination plan can not only boost a project’s impact, but also help approval rates of initial funding applications.