Practice #4:
Newsjacking

■ **Practice Description**

Organization recognizes and borrows the momentum of proximate, already-trending stories in its own communications; attaching the organization's views and content to larger viral discussions through "right messaging, right timing" maximizes exposure of the organization's own issue set

■ **Situation**

Organizations attempting to make messages "go viral" find it difficult to manufacture widespread sharing of content. As a result, their desired discussions never reach the more casually engaged supporters or the potential new supporters who simply lack familiarity with the organization or its issues.

■ **Action**

Organization monitors offline and online information resources—e.g., news—for trending discussions that relate, if distantly, to a policy priority. When these discussions are found, staff quickly attach previously created, sharable content to related conversations in social media. Evocative messaging is used to draw new connections and encourage engagement by the community. Standing procedures related to media monitoring, content attachment decisions, and attachment timing prevent over-investment of resources.

■ **Result**

By attaching to already trending issues and entering conversations at prime moments, organizations accomplish two things: first, engaging in new ways with current network members; second, ensuring their messages reach the "line of sight" of potential supporters belonging to other online communities.

■ **Laws of Social Media in Action**

☐ Community Contribution   ☑ Collective Narrative
☐ Transparent Motivation   ☐ Short Distances
☐ Anonymous Critique   ☑ Quick Bursts
☐ Cocktail Etiquette   ☑ Conservation of (Personal) Energy
☐ Crowd Arbitration   ☐ 'Selfish' Sharing

► **Conclusion #91**
The near-universal aspiration among advocacy professionals to manufacture viral messages for a large group of stakeholders is beyond reach; no algorithm yet exists to predict—or aid in production of—content that is viral on-demand
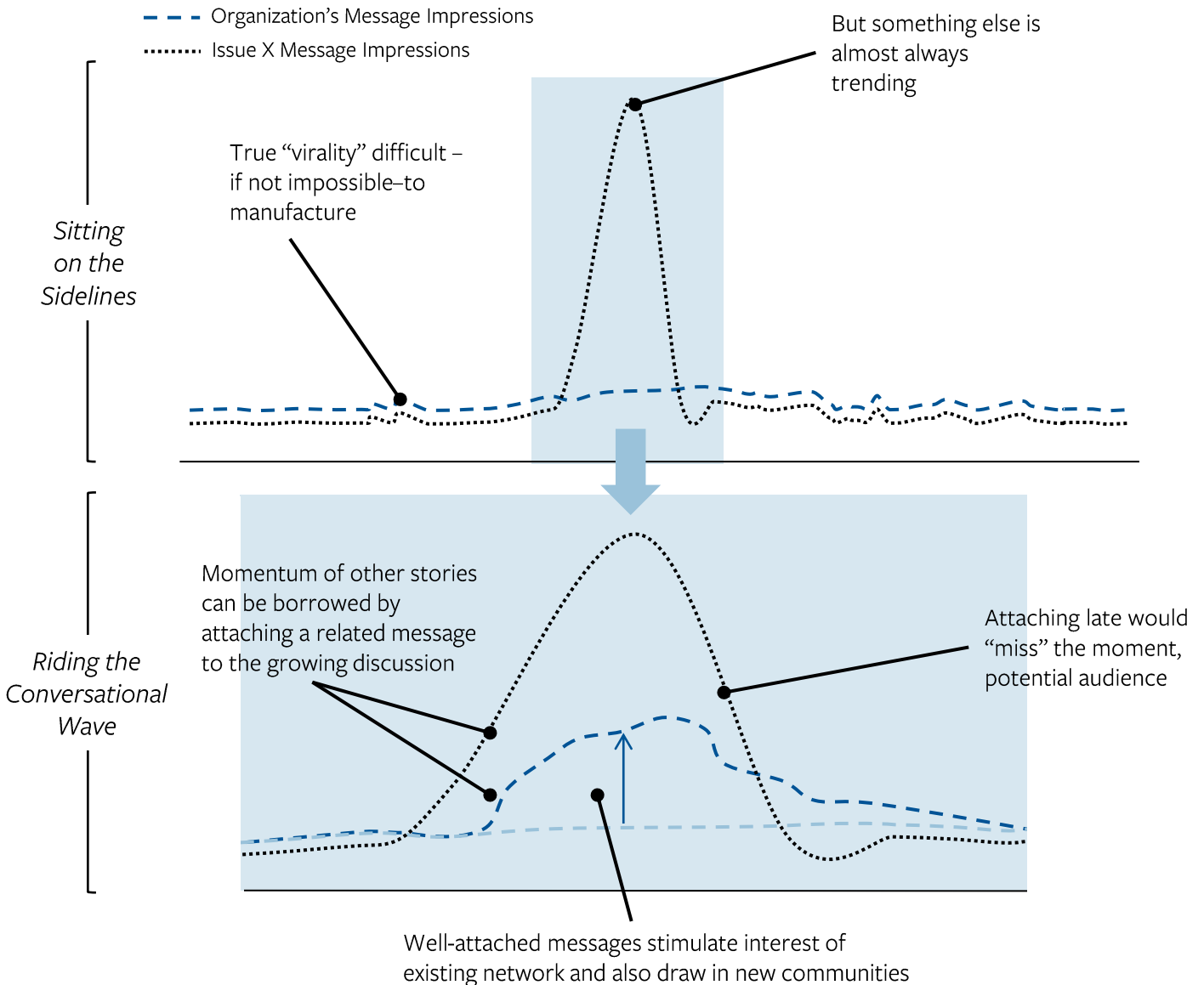
► **Conclusion #92**
That said, advanced players are attaching their content to existing or rising conversational waves—the already-trending conversations that materialize organically every day

Borrowing Momentum to Increase Message Visibility

Message Impressions Over Time
Illustrative

– – – Organization's Message Impressions
· · · · · · · Issue X Message Impressions

But something else is almost always trending

True "virality" difficult – if not impossible–to manufacture

Sitting on the Sidelines

Riding the Conversational Wave

Momentum of other stories can be borrowed by attaching a related message to the growing discussion

Attaching late would "miss" the moment, potential audience

Well-attached messages stimulate interest of existing network and also draw in new communities

▶ **Conclusion #93**
Skillfully "borrowing" momentum from a trending conversation requires excellent timing, a high level of skill in associative messaging, and ready-to-use content for deployment in the larger conversation

▶ **Conclusion #94**
Successful practitioners place a premium on speed in assessing the opportunity and proceeding when appropriate; fast decision-making both limits the time and resources spent on the activity and ensures entry into the conversation before it has crested (to maximize exposure)

Considering Newsjacking Opportunities
A General Process Outline

#1	#2	#3
Identify Trending Content	**Validate Potential Waves**	**Attach Organizational Messaging**

- Skim various media platforms daily for breaking/trending news or developments related to the organization's policy priorities

- Isolate news, specific articles, quotes, and other forms of phenomena to serve as carriers of organizational messages

- Use combination of volumetric data, gut observation to gauge interest levels within organization's targeted stakeholder community

- Check not only for commentary but also capacity to drive sharing and interactivity within and across social media platforms

- Attach approved messaging, organizational positions to currently trending phenomena in thoughtful, creative manner

- Match tone and or language used by stakeholders and encourage those exposed to content to share or take an action

▶ **Conclusion #95**
There are three distinct types of media moments to be Newsjacked—breaking news, lingering headlines, and cultural phenomena; these moments are distinguished foremost by how long they remain a relevant part of the public consciousness
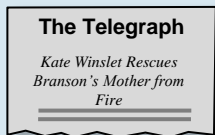
▶ **Conclusion #96**
In all cases, sharable messages that draw creative connections between the trending theme and an organization's policy message have the highest likelihood of getting noticed; punchy photos, videos, and data points can attract individuals who are interested in the message but not part of the organization's regular audience

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Attaching Message to Crowd-Attracting Content
Choosing Ridable Waves

Breaking News: 1-3 Day Timeframe

The Telegraph
Kate Winslet Rescues Branson's Mother from Fire

LFB LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Earned media:
- BBC News
- *New York Post*
- *Vogue*

Actress Kate Winslet saves a life during mansion fire...

...story picked up by London Fire Brigade as illustration of need for fire safety education...

...and featured on LFB blog post where Winslet invited to a safety seminar

Lingering Headlines: 1-3 Week Timeframe

WILL WORK FOR FOOD

@PBS
PBS is trusted, valued, and essential. See why at valuepbs.org. (please retweet!)

Sharing in single day:
- Retweeted 8,696 times
- Reached 1,373,889 followers
- Added 5,000+ new followers

During debate season, presidential candidate states will cut PBS funding if elected...

...sparking internet users to protest potential funding cuts via Big Bird memes...

...allowing PBS to place ads where memes searched, assert PBS value through Twitter and microsite, rally support

Cultural Phenomena: 1-3 Month Timeframe

AARP

Viewing:
- Watched 133,000+ times on YouTube alone
- Story picked up by news sites online and local news sites across country

Singer Carly Rae Jepsen produces catchy hit song "Call Me Maybe"...

...leading AARP to recognize song's potential to bridge generation gaps...

...and inspiring AARP to create own version encouraging youth to call their grandparents on Grandparent's Day

▶ **Conclusion #97**
First, Do no Harm: Newsjacking is not a riskless venture, and considering probability of harm versus benefit is a must for the social media user; anxieties regarding potential backlash from newsjacking should be heeded in situations where the cost-benefit is uncertain

The Go/No-Go Decision
Self-Tests for Determining Whether or Not to Newsjack

The Critical Quiz for Any Emerging "Media Moment"

		Yes	No
First three tests can be met in the moment...	• Is the trending issue or news tied in any obvious way—or could it be tied in any obvious way—to our organization, and/or one of our top-three priorities?	____	____
	• Can we add a new, relevant perspective that might connect with the audience at a values level?	____	____
	• Can we add a fresh, catchy, and fun angle on the subject that is also tasteful (and gentle)?	____	____
...while meeting last test requires preparation	• Do we have credible, appealing, shareable content that makes our organization a plausible conversation partner?	____	____

If "No" to any of the above questions, do not attempt a newsjack

Zones of Comfort for a Particular Newsjacking Situation

Association between News and Organization's Issue Set

	Low Risk-Low Reward	High Risk-High Reward
High	*A Good Starting Place*	*Go...But if it Gives You Pause, Pause!*
Low	*Not Worth the Effort*	*Wait Until "Expert"*

Risk-Reward Continuum

Creating Option Value
How to Make Newsjacking Easier

Prepping for Quick Response	**Monitoring for Right Moments**	**Being Frugal with Time Invested**

Bank of (Shareable) Content

- Photos, quotes, video testimonials, infographics— visuals that "travel well"
- Content covering expert opinion and human interest (emotionally–driven) for use when needed
- Associative messaging examples

Plans for Known Events

- Recorded dates of relevant events—especially release of annual reports that pose challenges
- Preparation of counter-arguments, which can be posted and attached to opposition hashtags (for defusing attacks, earning media coverage)

Time Investments

- 20 minutes per day to monitor, respond to breaking news
- Policy of backing-off immediately if no uptake by community
- Additional time invested to stoke conversation when entry to larger discussion is earned

Media Moment Scans

- Multiple phrasings of key organizational priorities entered into social media search functions, saved for daily exploration
- Alerts from various sites for keyword matches

*Speaking Timeframes**

- Twitter window: between 1pm and 3pm EST Mon through Thurs (nights after 8pm and Fridays after 3pm are lowest uptake times)
- Facebook window: mid-day is best; before 8am and after 8pm worst

*As of publication date
Source: Images from the Noun Project; National Journal Membership Research interviews and analysis. © 2013 National Journal

Practice Assessment
Newsjacking

Low ——→ High

Time Commitment: ● ○ ○ ○ ○

Implementation Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ○

Required Degree of GA Involvement: ● ● ● ○ ○

Impact: ● ● ○ ○ ○

Overall Grade: B

Worthy of consideration for organizations with significant resources dedicated to social media. Success is heavily dependent on having a pre-authored action plan for identifying relevant conversational waves, on speed to action, and on being highly familiar with rules of interaction in social media.