

asterisk

Insights and smart practices from your content team

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The web, mobility and the multi-screen phenomenon have changed how people consume information. With so many platforms, organizations are pressured to tell their stories in new and diverse ways. This newsletter looks at what these developments mean for our clients, and at emerging trends and practices in marketing communications across all media.

We hope you enjoy it. [Tell us what you think](#) -- and let us know if there are topics you'd like to read more about.



THE KEY INGREDIENT FOR A WINNING ANNUAL REPORT

Executive input is essential to a successful annual report. While organizations often wait to engage senior leaders until there's something concrete to show them, involving the executive team early helps ensure an efficient process with fewer hiccups.

Strategy should always lead creative

Annuals don't just tell any story -- they demonstrate that an organization knows its purpose, makes good plans and can execute effectively.

Senior leaders are in the best position to lay out what the strategic story should be, connecting the dots between last year's achievements and next year's goals. It's important to respect that their time comes at a premium. An exploratory conversation can be brisk and brief and still yield all the themes and highlights needed for writing and design to proceed confidently.

LINEUP

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SHOUT-OUT

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA

Congratulations to MHCC on the release of its *Together Against Stigma* book -- a compendium of presentations, panels and workshops given at the Commission's 2012 international anti-stigma meeting in Ottawa. Available online as an [interactive flip book](#), with videos of keynote presenters including Glenn Close and Lloyd Robertson, the 100+ page document outlines best practices and emerging strategies for combatting stigma, the single biggest obstacle to accessing care when people face mental health issues. The three-day international conference drew more than 700 delegates from 29 countries to Ottawa: Ascribe's writers were on hand to capture and synthesize the proceedings and compiled the text for the publication.

Third-party facilitation helps

Being asked questions from a fresh perspective can lead executives to consider their answers in a new light -- resulting in a fresh, authentic story that's specific to the organization, and helping avoid the creative clichés that often bog down strategically unfocused reports.

Avoid do-overs

While communications directors often feel pressure to own the story of the year, their real role is to deliver a strategically on-target product. That's all the more reason to gather the right inputs at the start. Whether simple or high creative, early executive input helps avoid costly and time-consuming changes in direction once work is underway.

The annual report is an organization's opportunity to tell a compelling strategic story -- and that starts with perspective from the top.

The Ascribe team has written hundreds of annual reports over the past 17 years for clients throughout the public and private sectors, facilitating strategic messaging sessions with executive teams of all sizes and characters.

PUNC'D

PUNCTUATION EXPOSED

Punctuation is essential to making even the simplest communications clearer and more powerful. PUNC'D tells the hidden stories of punctuation marks and how they're used.



We chose *asterisk** for our newsletter name -- and company wordmark -- because asterisks are versatile, practical and playful, and signify noteworthy things.

The word asterisk comes from the Greek asteriskos, which means "little star". In serif fonts, asterisks usually have five arms; in some sans serif fonts they have six. Certain variations have as many as 16 arms -- less star, more supernova.

Asterisks have been around for at least 5,000 years. In the Middle Ages, genealogists used them to denote a person's date of birth. Today, they help mask swear words (@#!), call out spelling corrections on Twitter (**TWEET**) and rescue people from call centre menus.*

Maybe one of the most potent uses of the asterisk came when Barry Bonds -- often accused of steroid use -- approached Hank Aaron's home run record. Critical fans held up signs covered in asterisks to suggest his achievement demanded qualification.

***To return to the previous menu, press star... (We knew you'd get it; we just wanted to use an asterisk.)*

PRACTICE POINT

HOW TO COPY TRACKED CHANGES BETWEEN DOCUMENTS IN MS WORD



TIME TO RETHINK YOUR ANNUAL REPORT?

Many organizations are wrestling with how to get the most impact out of their annual report while keeping costs down and managing more communications platforms than ever before. A digital AR can tell a strategic annual story without sacrificing impact for the sake of economy. Get our take on digital annual reports [here](#).

CONTENT MATTERS CANADIAN CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance abuse is a complex problem that touches every Canadian community. The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) brings together treatment and prevention professionals once every two years to share research findings and best practices at the national *Issues of Substance* (IoS) conference. CCSA used IoS 2013 as the venue to launch its latest *Substance Abuse in Canada* report. Ascribe helped copyedit and restructure the scientific report, which focuses on the maternal, neonatal and early childhood consequences of drug use during pregnancy. We also edited presentation and workshop abstracts for the conference program and website.

Track Changes is one of Microsoft Word's most useful features, simplifying document reviews and creating a version-by-version record of edits. Things can get tricky, though, when multiple reviewers work on different copies of the same file or changes from separate documents need to be integrated into one.



How do you import all edits without losing the tracking?

Simply cutting and pasting text between files wipes out the tracked changes in the pasted text. Fortunately, there is a way to preserve your tracked changes:

- In the first document, select the text you want to copy.
- Press ⌘ + FN + F3 (Mac) or CTRL + F3 (PC). This will cut (not just copy) the text and all its tracked changes.
- In the second document, press ⌘ + FN + SHIFT + F3 (Mac) or CTRL + SHIFT + F3 (PC) to paste your selected text along with its markups.

POP THE CULTURE FILE

Storytelling from beyond the grave -- and across platforms

Adapting content successfully across platforms is a challenge in any field. Who hasn't heard "the book was better" walking out of a movie?

One TV series showing how to get it right is AMC's *The Walking Dead*. Following an ever-evolving group of survivors through an apocalyptic zombie free-for-all, the show's producers know they have to stay true to their source material - a beloved graphic novel -- while delivering enough surprises to keep die-hard fans hooked.

They seem to be doing just fine. Now on its midseason break, the show broke records with its season four premiere as the most-watched drama episode in basic cable's history.

Part of the series' success is that the creative team didn't change what really matters. Even as plot points shift, *The Walking Dead* honours the heart of the comic: the struggle to remain human in an inhuman world. The writers have kept the spirit of the comic alive -- or rather, undead.

Questions? Suggestions?
Send us an [email](#).

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STORYTELLING KEY MOMENTS IN STORYTELLING HISTORY

Since humans have had language, we've probably had stories. What those have been -- and how they've been told -- has changed constantly over the centuries. Here's a little storytelling time travel for you:

1215

The Magna Carta, written in 1215, tells English royalty a pretty succinct story: that the powers of the king are not absolute.

1901

Guglielmo Marconi successfully completes the world's first trans-Atlantic radio broadcast, launching a new medium for storytelling.

Today

Reigning satirists Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart continue to blur the line between news and comedy, delivering the least factual yet most accurate accounts of current events and politics.

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