



“Excuse me, where can I find an audience?” Science through storytelling - targeting your audience

Hadar Elyashiv (1,2), Sandy Boehnert (1), Chelsea Korpanty (1), Valeriia Kirillova (3), Gema Martínez Méndez (4), Andrea Orfanos Cheuquela (5), Rebecca Borges (6), Dharma Reyes Macaya (1), and the OUAT team of 2016/2017 and 2018 (contact first author for full names of team members and affiliations)

(1) MARUM – Center for Marine Environmental Sciences, University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany (helyashiv@marum.de), (2) Dr. Moses Strauss Department of Marine Geosciences, Leon Charney School of Marine Sciences (CSMS), University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel, (3) Alumni MARUM, University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany, (4) Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research, Bremerhaven, Germany, (5) Institute of Environmental Physics, University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany, (6) Leibniz Center for Marine Tropical Research, Bremen, Germany

Created by an international group of marine science PhD students and postdoctoral researchers, the project “Once Upon A Time. . . A Scientific Fairy Tale” aims to communicate science and promote the dialogue between scientists and the general public via storytelling. We started the project in 2016 and by the end of 2017, our first “Once Upon a Time. . .” volume of stories was published as an illustrated, free to download e-book in English, German and Spanish.

As our final product was a free e-book, we initially aimed to target anyone with a familial or pedagogical connection to children: your grandma, your neighbour, the people we interact with daily and of course teachers. Yet finding the right audience for our project is still an ongoing task. The challenge of reaching an audience starts from the first moment we envisage the project. In our project, this challenge continues during the writing phase as well as when we translate, illustrate and read the stories.

Specifically since our project is volunteer-based, we are learning ‘on the job’. Outreach seems to be our biggest challenge, though at the same time it is rewarding in both academic and non-academic aspects. Through the process of science outreach, we expanded our professional network within and outside our field and it helped us to sharpen our popular science “sales speech”. Outside academia, we became familiar with international groups and local communities of artists, journalists and writers. As we work on our next volume of stories, we are already applying some of our new connections achieved through different outreach activities and our growing experience in the field of science communication.

Reaching out to the audience and raising interest in our project was the next step after the book was out. To us as scientists, who are used to the conference, lab and colleagues crowd, this new field was challenging. Soon enough we organised our team so that a few members were devoting their time to marketing and event-related tasks. We started using social media locally (in Bremen, Germany) and internationally, posting and organizing reading events in three languages. We used classic marketing strategies (e.g. business cards, postcards) to motivate people to download the e-book and to read it to kids or for kids to read on their own.

We are positive that these events were an opportunity for our audience to acquire familiarity with new topics and ask questions in a relaxed, non-traditional (e.g. non-classroom) environment.