

5 communications lessons from The Great British Baking Show

If you haven't been watching PBS' The Great British Baking Show (which is called the Great British Bake-Off in the UK, where it originates), you are missing out on one of the most charming competition shows out there. Each season begins with a baker's dozen contestants, who are asked during each episode to complete three tasks: a specific type of baking task (cookies, pies, sponge cakes, etc.) , a technical challenge, and lastly, a "signature bake." Their "bakes" are judged by Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood, who each week choose a star baker, who has distinguished him/herself that week, while also asking one of the contestants to leave. At the end of the season, only one contestant will remain.

1. Focus on form AND function

During the "Biscuits and Traybakes" episode that aired this past Sunday, the signature bake challenge was to create a beautiful tower made of biscuits. The tower had to measure around 10 inches and be creative, using different types of biscuits. Frances, who has been distinguishing herself for her creativity during the previous weeks, had a bad bake—her tower of biscuits collapsed right before the judging, prompting Mary to tell her that the "brief" was to build a tower and that it didn't matter if her biscuits were tasty or her idea creative.

It's not enough to look good or to be very creative, if the communications vehicle does not fulfill its mission. We've all seen beautiful websites that don't have the correct information or that are difficult to navigate (which is what UX/UI tries to correct). This is why overly creative ads that don't "convert" are a waste of money.

2. Technique and precision matter

Every episode of The Great British Baking Show has a technical challenge. The “Biscuits and Traybakes” episode required bakers to create tuiles, a delicate French cookie. A lot goes into creating tuiles—the batter must be of a certain consistency, you have to be careful to not over or under bake them, and they are very delicate, so you must know how to handle and shape them properly.

The lesson for communicators is simple: you can't rely on creativity alone. You have to learn the craft too. And you have to be precise with what you want to achieve.

3. Consider who you're baking for

During the show, it's clear that the contestants have to win Mary and Paul's approval. It doesn't matter if the contestants have been baking for years and their families love their stuff, if Mary and Paul don't think it tastes good or it is not properly baked.

The audience matters. How sophisticated are they? What are they looking for? What will appeal to them?

4. You have to bake a lot of cookies

Baking well takes both knowledge and practice, but especially practice. The more you bake, the more you know what works and what doesn't. You learn how to judge whether something is baked enough. You figure out your own shortcuts or how to switch up a recipe to make it taste right.

Experience matters in communications. That's not to say you can't try new ways of doing things, but only that you can do it better if you've been doing it for a while.

5. You have to taste it!

During the “Pies” episode, contestants were asked to bake a fruit pie. One of the contestants, Ali, found fruit pies so disgusting that he didn't even bother to taste the filling for

his own apple pie. When tasting the pie, Paul reminded Ali that it is a must to taste your food. Ali was voted off the show because his pie didn't taste good (and he had a couple of other technical issues too).

Perhaps we don't actually taste stuff in communications, but we do have to understand what is going on with our "ingredients" and our "bake." We have to do some research to understand what our audience wants and what is important to communicate. And of course, we measure: we look at the results for a campaign or at the Google Analytics for a website.

Do you watch this show? Would you add anything else? Let me know in the comments.