Good practices from
projects like yours

'Communication is a way to keep all partners actively involved in the project' Jan Willem Gunnink, project coordinator, COMET

'For me it's only natural to put considerable effort into communicating the outcomes of our work. We receive massive amounts of taxpayers' money to carry out fantastic projects. Letting the public know how this money is spent is an obvious obligation. In addition, many of our consortium partners share a commercial interest in exploiting our results. So we invest up to 10 % of our resources in communication and dissemination activities.

The communication plan that we drafted at the start of our project includes a variety of tools and ideas to help ensure that Europe's manufacturing industries quickly understand the objectives of our COMET project and the potential impact of using robots for cost-effective, high precision manufacturing in factories of the future. It also includes the consortium's procedures for disseminating information: partners always get the chance to check whether the information is correct or perhaps confidential.

Communication is certainly a way to keep all partners actively involved in the project. We decided to invest in small gadgets and materials with the project's name on them. You'd be surprised of the effect a simple sticker displaying the project's name on a robot can have. Similarly, we made sure that banners with the project's name were available right from the beginning.

Most of the work is carried out jointly with the marketing department of the coordinating company, but we do ask all work package leaders to contribute a little to generating noise around our project. For example, they each submit one "tweet" a month for our Twitter account. We also have about 1 000 subscribers to a digital newsletter and we make sure all partners get their share of visibility. This is resulting in numerous expressions of interest in our products. I think it's somehow similar to how washing powder is advertised: show up everywhere and it pays off.

The best advertisement, however, is demonstrating a working product. This spring we will organise what we call "open training days" in several countries. Anyone interested will be welcome to learn about our work and see a demonstration of what our advanced robots can do. Communication is not something that you give to someone as a task on the side; it's really one of the most important aspects of running a successful project.'

▶ **Twitter feed:**
https://twitter.com/COMET_project

'People are even taking it on themselves to call our scientists'

Marilou Ramos Pamplona, project coordinator, LUPA

'In our project, we use information about dogs' genetics to improve our understanding of diseases that occur in both dogs and humans. For the collection of DNA samples our scientists spend a lot of time communicating with dog owners, breeding clubs, vets and people at dog shows.

Our communication activity is very decentralised, as it must take into account the specifics of each of the twelve countries that we work in. All of our scientists have direct access to flyers and posters. They keep an eye on relevant events in their regions, contact dog shows to ask for a booth and talk to as many dog owners and breeders as they can.

We publish information about our work in popular journals for pet lovers, all the way through the project and as soon as results become available. In our articles, we ask people to submit samples and we explain our findings. Those can be used to screen dogs for particular diseases, so they are of interest to this same community. The scientific credibility of our findings obviously relies on our research basis. Our communication with the broader public is never secondary to publishing in high-profile journals like *Nature or Science*. Quite the contrary: we issue a press release for general publications whenever our work is taken up by journals of good standing.

A prerequisite of communication is to acquire a good understanding of the ways your target audience will respond to your message. Some dog lovers fear that our research might hurt dogs. Dealing with animal welfare issues right at the start of our presentations helps to ensure a positive response. I am impressed to see that our approach does not just encourage people to let us take DNA samples; they are even taking it on themselves to call the scientists whenever they find a disease in one of their breeds.'

▶ **Call for action for dog lovers:**
http://tiny.cc/tbwtiw

'It is worthwhile to collaborate with others to amplify your work' Michele Cocco, project coordinator, ARGOMARINE

'Our project deals with signalling oil spills and predicting their evolution. Rather than focusing exclusively on the small circle of scientists working in this field, we have also tried to involve people to whom the preservation of the marine environment – and hence our project – is relevant. For example, we have been organising local workshops with coastguards and municipalities. We have also produced an applet for smartphones that can be used by people at sea – like recreational sailors, fishermen and scuba divers – to report oil spills when they find any.

Sending out a press release is a good way to promote these actions. For us, it was helpful to include a link to a video clip that introduced our work. We hired professionals for that, so that the imagery and style were very accessible. Professionals have also recently helped us in creating a social media presence, which has definitely increased our visibility. I think it would be advisable to dedicate a budget to this type of assistance right from the start of a project.

Being active in communication meant that I, as the coordinator, encouraged all the partners to think about what we could do. It also means having the contacts and resources to react in a timely and efficient way whenever something happens that could be relevant to your work. In our case, right after the accident with the Costa Concordia ship, the partners discussed whether we could somehow respond. Since one of the main concerns at the time was possible oil leakages, we decided to make a simulation and issued a press release. This resulted in plenty of reactions.

Finally, we found it worthwhile to profit from existing meetings and conferences and to collaborate with others to amplify our work. As an example, our final workshop will take place at the Maritime Days, where thousands of people will be present. We have also established contacts with another EU-funded research project working on a closely related topic. I expect that we will organise a cross-project demonstration soon.'

▶ **Project video:**
http://youtu.be/_5biJLVZjxg

'The key to a successful media campaign is in the planning'

Colin Smith (media officer) and
**Emile Greenhalgh** (project coordinator), STORAGE

'The STORAGE project has attracted quite a lot of attention, ranging from *Der Spiegel* to the *New York Times*. As a result, there has been considerable interest in the technologies being developed and the subsequent impact they could have on future automotive applications (and beyond). In fact, Volvo has estimated that the advertising exposure from the STORAGE project has been worth EUR 112 million, from the press release (January 2010) up to May 2011. If you set that off against the cost, it is good value for money! To give an idea of what it involves for a team of researchers:

▶ Initial meeting (1 hour) – This involves meeting with your press officer to discuss the project. The press officer will need to take notes for the press release and work out the campaign timeline.

▶ Editing process (1 hour) – A draft release will come back to you for approval. You will need to look at the release to ensure the copy is accurate.

▶ Speaking to the press – As a rule of thumb, always remember that broadcast (TV) will take the most time and online media may take the least amount of time as they tend to use press releases verbatim.

▶ Interviews (1-2 hours) – If your story has a really interesting visual element, always remember that the broadcast press may want to come and interview you in a lab. You may need to invest extra time preparing the lab for filming.

▶ Long-term support – Be prepared to put some long-term support into your press campaign if it has been very successful, as you may get further coverage in other countries over a longer period of time. You may also get calls for collaborations and enquiries about your research from funders and other stakeholders. Develop a plan for responding to enquiries in a timely way. For example, a web page you can refer people to, which will reduce the time spent repeating general information to callers.

After issuing our press release, we received a huge number of queries from the press as well as approaches from industry for more information about STORAGE. For example, we received an invitation and funding to visit Singapore and Canada (Montreal), organised by the FCO to present the technologies to researchers and industries in these countries, with the aim of initiating future collaborations. Similarly, exposure from STORAGE led to the project coordinator being invited by Tourism London to represent London.

If we were to give a single tip for future project coordinators, it would be this: the key to a successful media campaign is in the planning. Before you even begin a campaign, it is important that the key people involved all agree on the answers to the following:

▶ What do we want to achieve with this publicity? For example, do we want more students to apply to our department? Do we want funding? Do we want the public to learn about this interesting area of research?

▶ Who are our audiences? Are they schoolchildren, other academics, policymakers, business, industry or the general public interested in science?

▶ How will we achieve our objectives?'
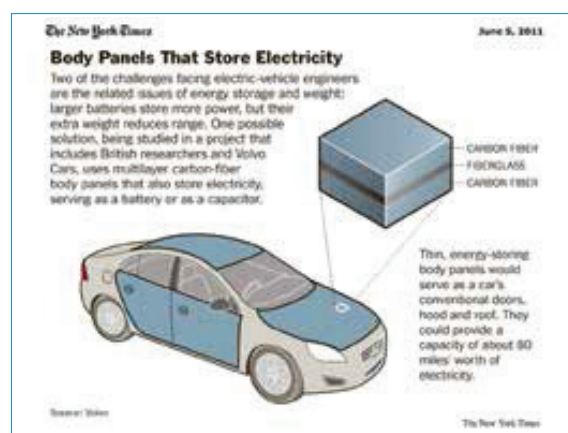
▶ Full article in the
New York Times:
http://tiny.cc/oxrpk

▶ Press announcement
of the project:
http://tiny.cc/90xtiw

'It is very important to know who you want to reach'

Oscar Valdemoros Tobia, project coordinator, EPOSBED

'Small and medium-sized companies do not always have a lot of resources. I am doing a large share of the communication work myself, together with the person in charge of marketing and communication at our company. Despite this restraint, our project has been quite successfully communicated, not least because we profited a lot from the support we got from European and local authorities.
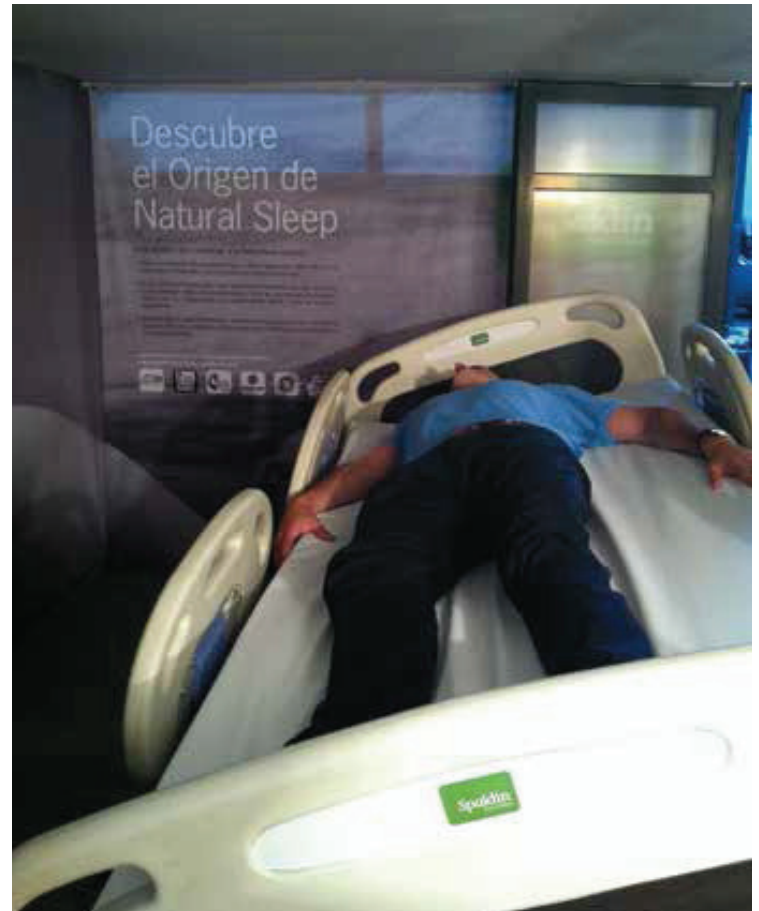
As an example, we closely involved local politicians in our project. When the head of a public institution comes to visit your factory, he will automatically be followed by the press. In this way it was easier for us to get press coverage. It is important to involve decision-makers and politicians anyway, inviting them to your meetings and keeping them informed, because they can help pave the way for your next steps. In our case, this helped us to arrange for the real-life testing of our product in a public hospital.

The European Commission supported us by introducing our work to Euronews, who produced a professional video about EPOSbed. We simply distributed the video and uploaded it to our YouTube channel. This has resulted in calls from throughout Europe, and also from North America and Brazil.

The technologies we use are complex – our medical beds rely on artificial intelligence – but that doesn't mean that it's impossible to explain our work to people. The bed we developed has a clear medical significance. It can, for example, be used by people who are homebound and do not receive full-time care. Anyone can grasp the actual application of the technology.

One thing I learned through working on this project is that it is very important to know who you want to reach. You need to focus your efforts on a clear target audience to maximise your investment. We spent a considerable amount of time and money on attending one large European exhibition. Although it did give us wide exposure, the people there were mostly from academia. We have realised that it is more important for us at this stage to go to places where we can find potential customers. I now prefer going to trade fairs instead.'

▶ **Website:**
http://eposbed.pera.com/