

**“The Ambassador” is a monthly communiqué designed to provide tips on best practices in effective communications.**

**Next month, look for guidelines on handling the Questions & Answers portion of your engagement.**

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## **Standing on the Shoulders of Benjamin Bankes**

**By Jerry Doyle**

How can bears, dogs and dummies help inform and build a better society? With a simple, strong, clear message and a memorable visual, that's how. As for communicators of that message, it behooves them to learn from history and leverage these visuals.

Smokey Bear was created near the end of World War II with his simple message of “Only you can prevent forest fires.” Today, the image of that bear cub is indelible in the minds of the American public and inextricably tied to the US Forest Service. It is the country's longest running public service announcement ever. McGruff the Crime Dog came about 30 years later to teach kids to “Take a bite out of crime.” Recognizable to virtually every citizen, McGruff has been supported since 1978 by not only the Advertising Council, of course, but nearly 20 communications agencies starting with Saatchi & Saatchi. Then there are those Crash Test Dummies, Vince and Larry, who have been reminding Americans of all ages that “You could learn a lot from a dummy.” They explain that the most effective way to prevent injury in a car accident is with the simple use of the seatbelt. As a result, safety belt usage went from just 14% when this PSA appeared in 1985 to 79% today – saving an estimated 85,000 lives.

The power of these icons is undeniable and their proliferation in the minds of Americans' citizenry is dependant not only on the ads, but on the carriers and deliverers of their simple message.

The country is about ready for its next icon. The issue is financial literacy. The message is “Feed the Pig” and the icon is Benjamin Bankes. You may have seen the TV spots and/or the media coverage surrounding it. Benjamin's name may or may not even be mentioned, but what is common in virtually all of the media coverage is his visual description and what he stands for. Indeed, most people don't know the names of the crash test dummies and sometimes forget that the crime dog's name is McGruff, but they never forget the image as described. That adult, standing pig with the rose-colored seersucker suit and bow tie is the image that opens the door through which the AICPA can then discuss the problem, the solution and some detail of the 360 Degrees of Financial Literacy.

### **Leveraging the Icon**

The image of Benjamin Bankes is jolting, arresting, even a bit startling. But, in his creation, that was purposeful. The striking visual is consistent with the urgency of

the problem and the statistics that help define the problem. The idea is to break through the multimedia clutter and get people to stop, think, and perhaps even begin changing behavior. Young Americans between the ages of 25 and 34 are simply not saving enough. In addition, the entitlements and healthcare coverage that current and past generations relied on may not be there for them, which stresses even more so the importance for putting more money away now. The image needs to be a sobering educator and reminder of these realities. At the same time, Benjamin can also make us laugh a little at his way of acting as a young person's financial conscience while making decisions about money. As a CPA Ambassador, it is incumbent upon you to invoke this image in your speeches and interviews about financial literacy. It is powerful, memorable, and supportive of your take-away. It will help you get quoted. It will help you stay on the minds of your audience longer. Early career adults or students at a university may not remember everything that you say, but will carry Benjamin Bankes with them.

### **Extra Tool**

As discussed in the CPA Ambassador Presentation and Media Skills Workshop, there are many tools at your disposal to support your message on financial literacy. In addition to the messages provided, there is no shortage of facts, statistics and figures to illuminate the problem that exists and solutions you can provide. You can cite sources, point to trends, create analogies and, of course, tell your own story and cull from your own experiences and expertise. Think of Mr. Bankes as yet another tool. Need another way to underscore the importance of setting aside 10% of each paycheck? Want to repeat a message about avoiding the abuse of credit cards? Need to reinforce the lesson on buying priorities? Use Benjamin Bankes. He is another tool you can use to really drive home your talking points.

A new section on the Feed the Pig campaign, a related economic survey, and the targeted demographic is available on the CPA Ambassador site. In addition, a Behind the Scenes video available through the AICPA provides a superb and entertaining supplement for face to face presentations, and even as background for reporters interested in the campaign.

### **Timing is Everything**

Mr. Bankes may very well have the staying power of those other icons I mentioned earlier and hopefully he will. But, audiences are just learning about him now. The media is still quite interested and, of course, you have the backing of the AICPA and the Ad Council who are relentlessly touting this campaign. Now is the time to accept as many speaking engagements and media interviews as your schedule permits. Strike while the iron is hot and you'll receive the full benefit of this new tool.

### **Cutting through the Clutter**

You – the CPA – are the expert and no one knows more about financial health and well being than you. You have the data, you understand the issue and you will not soon run out of advice on how to find the right course to personal financial stability. When preparing for a talk or an interview, you might find that all of this knowledge actually makes your preparation *more difficult*. Indeed, editing your speech content or your prepared answers to anticipated media questions takes time. This time investment is well worth it to ensure that your message is clear and sharp. Use Benjamin Bankes and his “Feed the Pig” message to help get to the heart of the matter. This is true when preparing for an hour-long university speech, or a 10-

minute interview. Cutting through the clutter with a simple, stark and relatable message is an advanced skill that will make you stand out from the rest and increase the likelihood that your quote will be used (and printed correctly) and that your audience will “take home” what you want them to remember.

### **Wrapping it up with Mr. Bankes**

An audience remembers most the first and last thing you say. Start your talk or interview on the subject of financial literacy with Mr. Bankes and end with “And what Benjamin reminds us is...” Finishing up with mention of this new icon will help cement your message in the minds of the viewers, listeners and readers.

I am confident that Mr. Bankes will join the ranks of Smokey Bear, McGruff and those crash test dummies in icon status of American PSA history. Take advantage and use this memorable image to drive home your message.

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Have a suggestion on a topic? E-mail Carmen Encarnacion at [cencarnacion@aicpa.org](mailto:cencarnacion@aicpa.org)

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