with public officials to co-create policies. This last level illustrates the idea that communication should also be used strategically to develop policies. "Communication is too often limited to promoting the image of the government, or diffusing news, instead of being used to contribute to transparency and stakeholders’ participation. A culture shift has to be made to change this approach," explained a speaker.

**Use visuals, but in a smart way**

Visual communication is the best way to catch people’s attention nowadays. Slides full of text don’t work anymore because people want more graphics and fewer words. But videos, images and infographics have to be of good quality. When it comes to graphic elements, it is necessary to keep them simple as people don’t have the time to analyse unfamiliar shapes. Images have to carry emotions or be strong in terms of concept. Developing videos, taking photos or designing visuals should be left to professionals. It takes skills to get quality.

**Content on social media should be diverse, informative, emotional and personal**

Social media is free, but requires skills to be used properly. Speakers explained that even if posts on policies or initiatives do not get many ‘likes’ or are often not shared, they are, nonetheless, important. However, social media should be used to engage with an audience, not just to push information such as a policy document. This might mean putting specific officers or a team in the spotlight (detectors dogs get a lot of likes) or joining the celebration of well-known events such as a special day, or asking people questions. Content should be diverse, informative, emotional, and personal.

**Chatbots can be useful, but do not replace human interaction**

Chatbots are computer programs that leverage machine learning and artificial intelligence to complete tasks while mimicking human conversation. More and more administrations are using them to cater to queries and complaints from their citizens. They can also be useful as some websites are hard to navigate and do not address simple questions. But many consider that chatbots can’t quite replace the human element, especially when it comes to providing information on complex regulations.

**Marcy’s Storytelling Tips**

Marcy Mason from US Customs and Border Protection shared a number of storytelling tips at the conference. Here they are:

**Tip #1:** Regardless of the topic you’re writing about, there’s always a story. You just have to find it. You can find stories in the most unlikely places. I have even found stories while having conversations with colleagues in the ‘bathroom.’

**Tip #2:** Remember your audience. You’re writing for your readers. My litmus test is: “Is this interesting to me?” If it’s not, then forget it. Always ask yourself: “What would interest me about this story?” And then follow your instincts.

**Tip #3:** Grab your readers’ attention immediately. Open your story with something interesting.

**Tip #4:** You need to reward readers. This means your story has to contain information of value.

**Tip #5:** Don’t sensationalize. It isn’t necessary. And it generally works against you.

**Tip #6:** Every source has his or her own perspective. So when you’re interviewing people, be aware that each person sees things through his or her own eyes. As the writer, you need to make sure that you stay focused on your story and don’t get sidetracked telling the story that others want to tell.

**Tip #7:** Do more than tell the facts. Tell a story that conveys the human side of your organization. Your messages will be remembered better that way.

Ms. Marcy Mason is a writer/editor in the Communication and Outreach Division of the Office of Public Affairs at US Customs and Border Protection.