

What's 'On Time'? It Depends on Who's Asking

People don't organize their lives according to a single timeline. Messaging should reflect their needs at any particular moment — clock time vs. event time.

The art of the hot take combines timeliness and originality to claim an outsize share of voice. That means you don't get points simply for being first, but for being very, very fast with something that makes you relevant to the conversation. Social media in particular rewards hot takes — instant punditry wins mindshare and traffic.

But for every 'Dunk in the Dark,' hundreds of thousands of signals went unremarked. Worse are numerous examples of hasty communications that went very wrong by striking the wrong note at a moment of public stress or tragedy. Timing is key to effective communication, true. But the right timing depends on a social contract with your audience about what kind of time you're communicating in.

Clock Time (Monochronic)

Clock time is based on a linear, mechanical perception of time in which one event is scheduled after another. As a quantitative metric, clock time can be spent, saved, or wasted. It's the prevailing way Western societies conduct business. Your audience is going to expect you to deliver the right message at the right time — but they'll also penalize you for delivering the wrong message at the wrong moment.

Event Time (Polychronic)

Polychronic time is defined by personal interactions — frequently several at once. Instead of judging the use of time in terms of quantity, polychronic cultures prioritize the quality of time engaged in. Communicating in event time isn't a zero-sum game. It's a dance in an elastic space that can stretch to accommodate many partners.

Polychronic communication is key to delivering messages based on signals from individuals. Instead of pushing information to them, you're providing them the information they want, responsively, when they need it. That means less sprinting to be first, but more focus on the nuances of different, simultaneous conversations.