



Friends of the Earth

PULL-OUT

Props on a shoestring

A well-chosen prop or costume can transform your campaign from a dull table of leaflets into an eye-catching, crowd-gathering occasion. But how do you go about finding the right prop? Paul Fitzgerald looks at some tried and tested methods.

Build your own

Keep it simple

Try and see the overall shape as simple geometrical units. Get the basic form, not the details. A chain saw is just a box and a flat rectangle. A tree is just a big tube and smaller tubes. Get lots of tubes and join them together. Then smooth over with papier mache (use PVA wood glue, not wallpaper paste). Stick to simple shapes. Then transform the basic shape with colourful paint. For example use bright yellow on your homemade bulldozer to make people think, "That's a JCB digger". Without paint props tend to look amateur and scruffy.

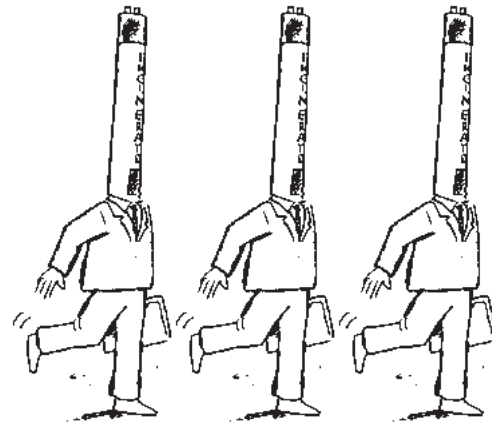
View it from a distance

Exaggerate details by making them bold, not realistic. Better still, do not build 3-D details if you can just paint them on. Coloured papers are even quicker than painting. If you are making a bulldozer, use the minimum amount of details so that you give the impression of a bulldozer. A good rule of thumb is to think of a simple cartoon bulldozer. As long as people think "bulldozer", you are OK, and if they think "silly pantomime bulldozer" that is better still.



Do not build the whole thing if a part will do

Why build a giant incinerator when three suits with chimney heads will be quicker and funnier?



What's the shelf life?

How long does the prop need to last? If it is for a one-off event, do not make it to last a lifetime. Electricians gaffer tape is often strong enough. Use materials like cardboard, rather than wood, as it will make them easier to transport around. Bear in mind that props do get a good bashing when used, so re-enforce the cardboard – tape bamboo behind weak edges, and polystyrene blocks into corners. And does it need to be waterproof in case of rain?

Make it light

A heavy prop is exhausting to wear and carry. Can it be built in pieces and dismantled for transport? Even a cardboard prop can be disassembled. Use large bolts, big washers and wing nuts, and strengthen the bolt holes with taped-on plastic sheets cut from washing up liquid bottles.

Make it cheap

Check out your attic, wood off-cuts, car boot sales or jumble sale for good sources of free materials.

Paul Fitzgerald runs Agitprops, a company which makes props for campaigners.

Props that work

A beautifully made prop is not necessarily the right prop. Before you start working on your prop remember to: **Keep it simple** Does the prop express a simple idea? **Would it work as a photo in the paper?** **Emphasise the point with a clear slogan.** **Co-ordinate your leaflets/posters with the prop.**



Birmingham FOE uses human traffic cones to stop the traffic.



Top: cardboard wildlife stay still for photo opportunities.



Above: Santa goes by train – a good Christmas stunt.

Keep it striking

Would it make you look twice? Repetition is a good trick: three of the same thing will have more impact than one. Can you add music or sound effects? What about staging a funeral and label the coffin, "My Local Park", "Our Local Shops", "Our Lungs"...

Keep it brief

If there is a story, make sure it is told quickly – keeping the attention of an audience for a long story is difficult. What about recruiting some drama students?

Keep it funny

Add a twist of humour. Satire puts your opponents in the killjoy role, and warms people to you.

Keep it big

Outsize everyday objects are striking -- build a giant chainsaw, or a giant test tube.

Tip

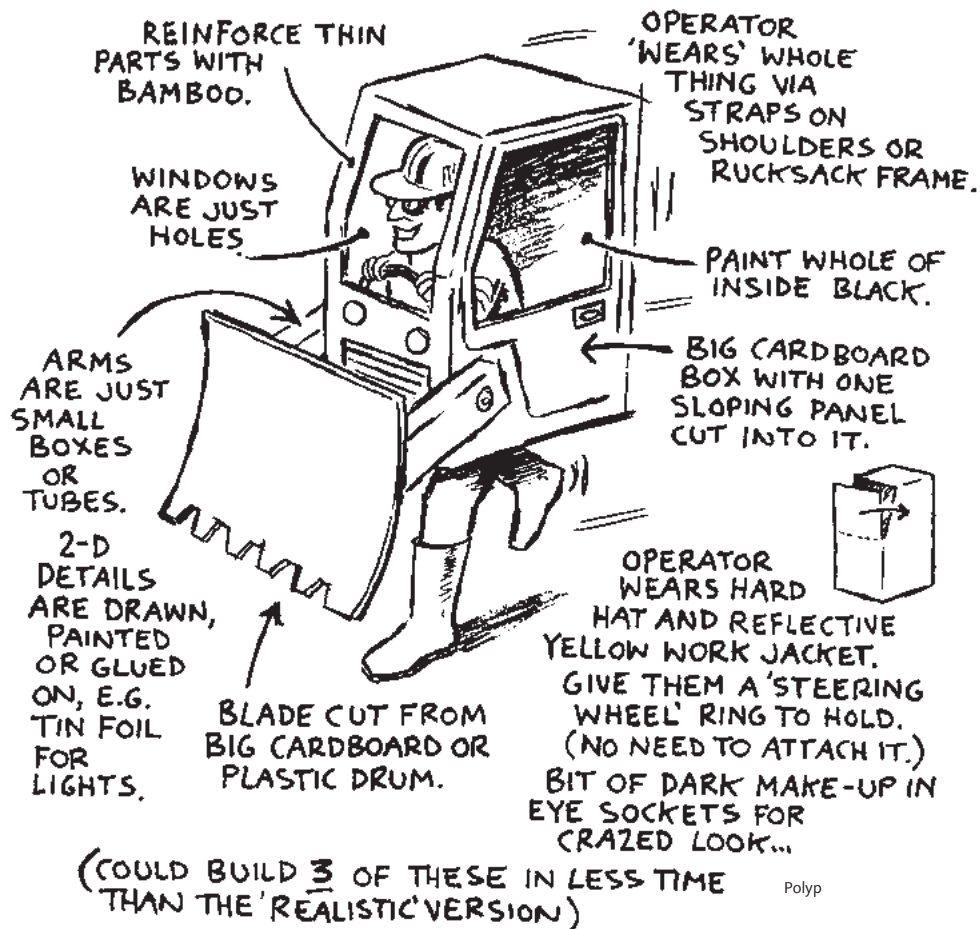
Props get ruined because no-one thinks about where to store them in advance. Ideally make your props so that they can be used again and again. One way to do this is to make it easy to dismantle and reconstruct

Keep it moving

A prop that moves is better than a static one, so put someone inside it (rucksack frames make good mounts). Why stay put when you can tour the town? Pay a visit to the council or the supermarket you are targeting to raise campaign awareness and help provide photo opportunities. If you are told to move on, do so.

Keep it versatile

A giant can-of-worms will serve for several different issues -- just change the label each time. Make it like a giant Jack-in-the-Box and then add something appropriate to your campaign, like, "More shopping centres!" "More traffic jams!"



Build your own digger...

Short of time and inspiration?

You could try hiring a prop or getting someone else to do the donkey work.

Hire it

Try the Yellow Pages under Fancy Dress or Theatrical Supplies. Costumes can cost anything in the range of £20 to £40 to hire, but it is worth while asking for a discount – they may be sympathetic to your cause.

Get someone else to make it

Find some sympathetic (or publicity-craving) artists at your local art/sculpture/drama department or street theatre group. Or persuade a local school to build it as a project.

Out on the streets

There no better advice than experience. Can you guess from the list of props below which worked and which did not? (Answers below.)

1. Alien visitors

Five silent, almond-eyed aliens (papier mache heads built around big pear shaped balloons, plastic colander eyes) exploring city centre consumerism and waste. Leaflets saying "People of Earth, we come in peace, but we do not understand why...(a..., b..., c...). Please explain!"

2. Major in a cage

John Major mask (joke/novelty shop) locked inside a cardboard prison on wheels, being dragged through town by a high court judge (costume hire). Big sign saying "GUILTY".

3. Stick of rock

Huge stick of rock labelled "Arms trade sweeteners". Used for a tug of war between military dictators and arms trade protestors.

4 Third World see-saw

A long see-saw representing the scales of justice. Third World farmers at one end (simple ragged clothes etc) and at the other large blocks of concrete representing the cash crops they'd need to grow to earn a decent living. Narrator explains this, and asks, "How many will it take... One? Two?, etc.". In fact it takes a large number of bricks, symbolising how the global trade system is stacked up against the poor.

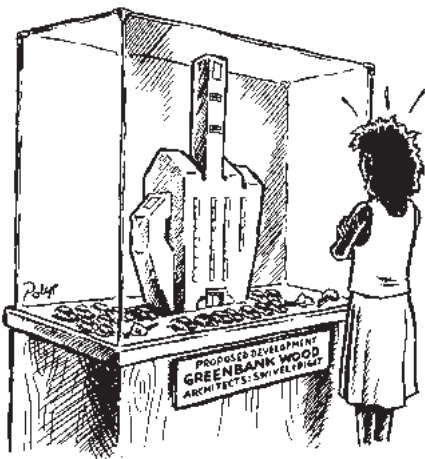
Answers

- 1 People loved the aliens. It drew a huge crowd and lots of press.
- 2 Our best ever for the public. Simple and direct, but no press.
- 3 Poor. Too complicated. Some press, though.
- 4 Not one person stopped! It was hard work and short on humour.

If your new year's resolution was to improve your local environment, then you need Friends of the Earth's great new guide to successful community campaigning. *How to Win* could be the most useful handbook you ever read. To find out for yourself, here is an extract from the introduction – written by the Local Campaigns Department's Elaine Gilligan. Friends of the Earth is also giving one free copy to every local group – see page 24 for order details.

Make it a resourceful new year with *How to Win*

Polyp



Campaigning. Big word, lots of meanings. At its simplest, campaigning is about getting organised to change something. We have the right to be involved in decisions that change our lives and unless we exercise that right, those in positions of power can do what they want to with a minimum of public opposition. If we want change – whether it's getting a pedestrian crossing near to the local school or tackling local pollution –

people have to get together with other people and make their views known. We have the power to change things – we choose who we vote for, what we put in our shopping basket, who we invest our money with. Campaigning is a vital part of a healthy democracy, where together we can challenge abuses of power in society.

More and more people, disillusioned with conventional politics, are joining campaign groups, forming their own campaign groups or deciding to just do something, be it signing that petition, sending that letter or email, stopping buying that product, investing ethically or recycling their bottles and cans.

How to Win deals with the basics of how to get started and get organised. You've got the power – this book tells you how to use it and how to win. It's aimed at any would-be campaigner who has decided they want to do something. It can be read as a step-by-step guide, or

can be dipped in and out of depending on what stage your campaign is at. And if you want further information there are plenty of useful contacts and suggested further reading. We also take a look at relatively new campaigning tools such as email and offer advice about how to build a website.

Campaigns are seldom won by individuals but by people. *How to Win* tells you how to go about getting that people power and getting the basics of your campaign in place. It also steers you through the complexities of finding your way around your local council to lobbying your elected representative.

There's no right way to campaign, but there are tried and tested ways based on experience. There are no guaranteed outcomes, but you may surprise yourself and have a lot of fun as well. This guide cannot provide all the answers, but it does provide anyone who wants to get started with the first steps on how to win.

Treat yourself!