

BEWARE OF ALIENS

A manual for a successful awareness campaign



How does
awareness work?

Tips for effective social
media posts

Tricks to write a press
release & get media
attention



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RAISING AWARENESS:

How does that work, exactly?

Raising awareness is a process to inform and educate people on an issue. The intention of awareness campaigns is that, by letting people know about an issue, they could **adapt or change their behavior or attitude** towards a **defined goal** through time.

To raise awareness you need to disseminate your message **on many different levels – and: on repeat**. You can combine the different ways in which you spread the message & all these layers combined will strengthen the effectiveness of your campaign. Examples are: press release, webinar, public speaking, newsletter, social media campaign, educational activities, training.

Inside the human mind

Humans have an array of habits. And a lot of those habits are unintentional. It's hard to change human behaviour. Especially when you want to change *unintentional* habits, and even more when the audience you want to reach has no direct 'win' from the behavioural change.

Sometimes it's striking that 'knowing that there is a problem' does not automatically have the effect of changing behaviour. Think about smoking or climate change.

It's a long process to get to real behavioural change. Humans need to be **motivated** and **provided with the right circumstances** to implement the new habits. Sometimes we need enforcement by law before we adjust our attitudes. *Think about texting while driving or drinking while driving.*

But behavioural change always starts with **awareness, knowledge and recognition**. And that's exactly what the Beware of aliens campaign aims to reach.



Setting realistic expectations

The stages of an awareness campaign go from **aware** over **interested** to **engaged**.

- **Aware**
They recognise the campaign and know what the message is. Yes!
- **Interested**
They want to know more & are curious about the topic. They visit the webpage. Wow!
- **Engaged**
They take an action you suggest to them on your website. Small or big action, doesn't matter. They engaged & participated. They got involved. Hi five!

With a relatively small campaign, it's already quite an achievement to reach 'awareness'. And with *small campaign* we mean *in terms of dissemination*. Unlike some brands, we don't have the means to launch a giant televised campaign throughout Europe, or to put massive billboards on every corner of the European streets. Or to repeat our message on a large scale for months or even years in a row.

The good news is that – thanks to technology – small campaigns can have a huge impact too, if only enough people spread the word towards the relevant audience.

The art of repetition

The key to raising awareness and eventually realising behavioural changes is to keep going and be consistent in the messaging. The more recognisable a campaign is, the faster people will become familiar with it.

The rule of seven

In the marketing world there is the magic 'rule of 7'. It's been proven that a person needs to see or hear a message 7 times before taking action. This rule dates from the 1930s, so it's very likely that in a world where we get bombarded with messages it's even easier to be overlooked compared to those early years.

Is it impossible to get attention from viewers? No, not at all, but with the massive daily influx of information, it has become even more important to **stand out, be surprising and original** in a way that people stop scrolling to watch or read your message.

It's key to not give up too fast. And to not be afraid to repeat your message time and again.

Let's do this!



BEWARE OF ALIENS:

Goals and desired outcome

Having impact on the targeted group of people. That is the main goal of every awareness campaign. The question is: how can you measure this impact? It's important to define a set of realistic goals. Ask yourself for example which amount of people you want to reach with your campaign.

Although it's important to set goals before an awareness campaign takes off, not everything is easy to measure. How could we for example know when 25% of the European citizens are aware of the existence of Invasive Alien Species - which would be a wonderful goal? Or how could we know how many aquarium owners are aware of the risks of throwing their aquarium water into the public pond? We would have to hire a market research company to set up a huge investigation. And that is merely impossible within the project.

Especially since the *Beware of Aliens-campaign* relies on a broad range of stakeholders and organisations in many countries and different languages that will help spread the message. This way, the campaign will be highly fragmented, which makes setting goals not easier.

When setting goals for the *Beware of Aliens-campaign*, we need to make sure they are SMART. Meaning they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

Every organisation and stakeholder can set their own goals for their role in the awareness campaign. They can – in their area – aim for a certain amount of clicks on social media posts, a certain number of views on the videos, a defined number of visitors on their website (should they dedicate a landingpage on their own website to the campaign), the number of articles on the subject in newspapers, etc.

The overarching organisation could set goals such as

- number of visitors on the campaign website (together with EASIN)
- number of downloads of the campaign materials per language
- number of views on the vimeo site
- number of downloads of the vimeo-video
- number of mentions of the campaign hashtag on social media
- number of media appearances



How to set realistic goals?

- Define what the minimum number of visitors / views should ideally be, according to the amount of stakeholders in the project and the size of their audience or the number of sub-organisations they reach.
- Define a timeframe within which you want to reach those goals.
- Measure regularly if your goals are on a great pace to be reached. If not: make an extra effort to achieve them. This manual will inspire you on how to do that!

BEWARE OF ALIENS: Materials for the awareness campaign

An awareness campaign draws the attention of a broad amount of people. A key element of such a campaign is the campaign materials that are at hand.

The Beware of Aliens-campaign is off to a good start, since there are a broad range of attractive materials at hand, easy to download and nice to share.

All materials are bundled on [a convenient webpage](#), situated within the website of EASIN. The broader public will also be able to help spread the message by downloading the visuals and post them on their own profiles.

Thanks to the **social media video**, the campaign will reach a maximum number of viewers. In the last years, social media channels have been encouraging posts that contain video by pushing these posts forward and giving them a higher visibility.

The posters with key messages are made available in two formats.

One format is aimed to 'home print' for anyone to hang at a window, in a shop, in a visitors center, in the locker room at work, etc.

The other format is suitable for professional printing. Organisations or companies can use this file to disseminate a larger number of high quality posters to all their departments or divisions.

Social media posts are prepared in the ideal formats for Facebook and Instagram, so they can be downloaded and posted quickly by the members of your organisation. A short piece of ready-made text is added, so users can copy-paste (or translate) the right message directly in the caption when posting.



BEWARE OF ALIENS: The strength is in the group effort

As mentioned before: unlike some brands, we don't have the means to launch a giant televised campaign throughout Europe, or to put massive billboards on every corner of the European streets. Or to repeat our message on a large scale for months or even years in a row.

The good news is that – thanks to technology – small campaigns can have a huge impact too, if only enough people spread the word towards the relevant audience.

Together for healthy nature? Small actions, big impact

Take responsibility

If everyone thinks that it's another person's job, then nothing much will happen. Especially with an awareness campaign, it's a matter of **reaching as many people as possible**. With every post and every share, we reach hundreds of extra people. Your role is crucial!

So don't wait for a sign from 'above', take action, write a series of posts on your personal social media, reach out to the press & communications officer in your organisation and make them aware of the *Beware of Aliens*-campaign you took part in.

Here, it truly helps you've got ready-made campaign materials at hand, that make it super easy to post, share, talk about and encourage your colleagues/friends to follow your example.

Don't be hesitant to ask - and ask again

It may seem odd or pushy, but in general, people are very likely to help one another out. Especially if they contribute to a good cause by doing it: together for healthy nature!

So that's exactly what you should do. Write emails to your contacts to actively ask them to share the Beware of Alien-posts your organisation puts into the world. With every share, you reach hundreds of more people. Doubling or tripling the impact of your campaign with one easy email: win!

Do you plan a second wave of posts on the subject? Email them again with the same question. If you write a genuine, informative and thankful mail, chances are high they will once again share and thus amplify your message.

Write to the media

Media attention stays a huge factor to get massive public attention.

It is super important for awareness campaigners (like you have become now) to have the media actively involved, or to at least send them a decent press release with concrete examples of the problem you're addressing.

Do you have personal media connections with journalists or reporters? Then it could be a great idea to invite them on a field trip to show them the impact of invasive alien species with their own eyes.

One more thing: you don't need to be (part of) an organisation, institution or company to reach out to the press - but it could help to add a credible reference, title or institution next to your name. In that light: don't forget to mention the support of the European Commission for this awareness campaign.



BEWARE OF ALIENS:

Social Media



Most of the target groups we want to reach with this campaign are part of the broader public. Some of them are quite specific, such as the soil transport companies or the forest contractors. But for the most part, the campaign is aimed at European citizens with interests such as nature, plants, pets or angling.

When writing this manual – in the second half of 2022 – Facebook has 407 million users in Europe. That's more than half of the population of 748,6 million. For Instagram, there are no specific stats about Europe, but the worldwide user number is 1,21 billion.

The reason behind the popularity of these platforms is the fact that we can constantly consult 'user generated content': news and photos posted by individual users. That way, we can stay connected with the lives of family and friends, but we also get to find groups of people who gather around one particular interest.

Moreover - and here comes the interesting stuff for awareness campaigners like we've become - a booming amount of citizens use **social media channels as their source for news**. This obviously has a down side, hence the circulating fake news. But the upside is that we can all be the 'bringers of news' by ourselves.

Our news is – in a nutshell: *beware of aliens, dear human*.

We also ask them to **take action**:

- Check, clean and dry your shoes before entering the forest.
- Share this message with your friends.

And to get them to do this, we appeal to their **community spirit**: *Together we keep nature healthy or together for healthy nature*.



Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn: insights on the platforms

Facebook continues to be the biggest social media network. Although the number of users keeps declining, and marketing gurus predict the end of FB is near, it still reaches a huge amount of people.

On Facebook people mostly connect with people they know personally – family and friends. But they also follow brands, companies and organisations they are interested in.

The tool of **Facebook Groups** got people to start communities that gather around one certain topic of interest. For example: running, angling, mountain biking, pets and how to keep them, aquariums, houseplants, ... For campaigners (or marketers) it's super convenient that the members of **your target audience** most likely **already grouped themselves**, so you don't have to look for a pin in a haystack.

Instagram - also owned by Meta (owner of Facebook) - is a very visual platform. Videos and photos are shared by billions. The average age of the audience on Instagram is a bit younger than on Facebook.

The algorithms that steer and curate the content in our very direction are now promoting video content in favour of static pictures. So it's a great thing that Beware of Aliens has a bunch of videos to share.

The use of hashtags is quite important on Instagram, so definitely read the chapter on hashtags.

LinkedIn has gained a lot of importance. It's a platform meant to connect (rather than 'befriend') on a professional level. On this platform, it's *not done* to share a bunch of holiday pictures or a movie of a kitten on a mowbot.

Here you share your thoughts on topics within your professional field. The movies and visuals of 'Beware of Aliens' can definitely wear the label 'professional'. They come with a serious message and are perfectly shareable on LinkedIn. Personal pages (of individuals) are preferred by the LinkedIn algorithms, rather than company pages, which get a much lower amount of visibility.

Liking, sharing, commenting

Interaction with posts is important on every social platform. The more likes, shares, comments a post gets, the more people you'll reach. And the more the algorithm will show your post in the feeds of people. If you see another stakeholder post one of the campaign visuals, you can easily help spreading the message by liking, commenting or sharing.

Posting: video - static visuals - stories

On **Facebook** you can share the Beware of Alien visuals (with caption!):

- by posting the images/movies on your **own profile**
- by posting the images/movies on a **page of your organisation, institution or company**.
- by posting both in **your stories** (every day, cause stories disappear after 24 hours).
- by posting the images **in relevant groups** and ask to share.

On **Instagram** you can share the Beware of Alien visuals (with caption!):

- by posting the images/movies on your **own profile**
- by posting the images/movies on a **page of your organisation, institution or company**.
- by posting both in **your stories** (every day, cause stories disappear after 24 hours).

On **LinkedIn**, you can post on your page and even go somewhat more detailed/nerdy on the subject in your field. Tell your own professional experience with aliens, the risks you have seen with your own eyes, the experience with making this campaign happen, etc.

When **posting videos**, the best way to do it, is to post the video 'native' on the channel, instead of using a link to the Vimeo- or YouTube-video. Social Media companies don't like links to video channels, because then, they get less viewers themselves. If possible: download the mp4-file of the movie on your computer or phone and post the video straight to your Facebook-, Instagram-, LinkedIn- or Twitterpage.

The caption: get the key message across

Social media platforms are absolutely fond of visual content. That's because they know people are triggered by it. Way more than by words. As the saying goes: one image tells more than a thousand words.

Still. When you grab people's attention with an image or a movie, they often WANT to read what it 's all about. At that point they start reading **the caption**. That is the small block of text (and emoji) that accompanies the video or photo.

It's important to keep the reader interested from the first word on. **Base your caption on the key message on the campaign visual** (poster) and stick to the spirit of that message. **Always use visuals and captions together, since they empower each other.**

Here's an example for you to tweak and translate for your own use.

🤔 Did you know that invasive alien species can travel with us secretly when we visit the forest? 🌿 Their seeds, roots & larvae are sticking to our shoes, our tyres & our gear. 🧴 Once in the forest they overgrow, chase away or disturb the existing species. The healthy ecosystem of the forest is gone, and so are the benefits for all of us. 💧 🧼 🐾 Clean and dry your shoes, paws and gear before entering the forest. 📢 🙌 Share this message to help protect our precious nature.



Call to action: literally tell them what to do

People checking their socials tend to be rather passively consuming the content - scrolling, scrolling, scrolling. **If you want them to act, you should literally tell them what to do.**

A perfect CTA

When we ask people to do something, that's called a Call To Action. For example: click here, download here, please share, read more.

Our goals are:

- That people get informed: invasive alien species exist.
- That people acknowledge ias are a risk
- That people help sharing the message
- That people check, clean and dry their clothes and gear.

Good CTA's to end your caption about Beware of Aliens with are:

Please share this message. Together for healthy nature 🙌

Want to help spread the message? Download free materials on the site! Click here 📄

👟 Next time you visit the forest? Check, clean and dry your shoes or tyres before!

🐟 Next time you go angling? Check, clean and dry your fishing gear before!

🐕 Want to help protect our precious nature? Make sure your pets don't escape!

📌 Want to be a responsible pet owner? Go to a trusted shop and ask for information on pet habits and behaviour before you choose your pet.

Hashtags: great for broader reach

#BewareOfAliens

Hashtags are actually a ‘label’ that you can ‘hang’ at your post. It’s a # immediately followed by a word that describes the theme of your post.

For example #nature or #plantlovers.

On a platform like Instagram, people can follow other users, but **they can also follow hashtags about topics** they find interesting. Again: very convenient if you want to reach a group of people with a certain interest, ‘cause they already filter out themselves by following a certain hashtag. You don’t need to go and look for them.

So, **if you add the right hashtags to your post**, chances are that your message reaches a whole bunch of new people that are within your target audience.

Good to know: Instagram has **a limit of 30 hashtags** per post.

How to find the right hashtags?

Go on Instagram and do some research around the themes you want to post about. Check which hashtags other users are using. If you want to check if a certain hashtag would work out, you can type the hashtag in the search bar of Instagram, it immediately shows how popular this hashtag is (and more likely to have followers).

A quick Google search can also help: Which hashtags to use about theme x’.

Tip: keep a list of your hashtags in a document or on your phone, so you can easily copy-paste them when you’re posting.

Important: for this campaign, always include the hashtag #BewareOfAliens.

Emoji: how to use them right

The use of emoji has fans and haters.

So let’s see what the numbers say.

Do people react more on posts with emoji in the caption?

Yes, more likes, more comments, more shares.

Are people more likely to read a newsletter with an emoji in the subject line?

Yes, they are!

But do not overuse emoji. And since every audience is different, you can easily use A/B testing when sending out a newsletter.

Paid posts

Did you know that only 10% of your followers actually see the posts you are crafting so meticulously? But: the higher the engagement of your followers, the higher that percentage gets.

So you can organically try to 'beat the algorithm' by using good (video)content, by posting regularly, and by actively asking your followers to engage.

Another way to increase your reach is to 'boost' your posts. That's a cool way of saying that you invest money, so that the algorithm pushes your post forward to your followers or to people that you want to target. You can target people according to age, gender and certain interests, for example.

In some organisations - especially in awareness, ngo, etc -, it's a standard habit to boost every post for an amount of €10 to €20, for example. Not a very big budget, but altogether a reasonable amount that's invested, just to make sure people - even your own followers - keep seeing you.



BEWARE OF ALIENS:

Newsletters & blogs

The Beware of Aliens campaign is an **excellent topic to include in any newsletter**.

Subscribers are often more engaged fans than followers on social media. When landing directly in your subscribers inbox, your message gets read a lot more than social media posts, hence the algorithm.

Subscribers tend to want to 'help' you. So definitely include a clear call to action: ask them to help spread the campaign broadly amongst their own followers.

Press

It's a great idea to announce the campaign to your local or national media with a press release. Media attention stays a huge factor to get massive public attention and credibility.

It is super important for awareness campaigners (like you have become now) to have the media actively involved, or to at least send them a decent press release with concrete examples of the problem you're addressing.

Do you have personal media connections with journalists or reporters? Then it could be a great idea to invite them on a field trip to show them the impact of invasive alien species with their own eyes.

You do not need to be (part of) an organisation, institution or company to reach out to the press - but it could help to add a credible reference, title, organisation or institution next to your name. In that light: **don't forget to mention the support of the European Commission for this awareness campaign.**



5 quick tips to make your press release a success

1. Write as if you were the journalist: headline, intro, quotes, etc.
2. Write as neutral as possible.
3. Stick to the facts. If we over-exaggerate the impact of aliens, the whole campaign loses credibility (cfr. 'Official' press releases on hornets that would allegedly spray poison in the eyes of people ...).
4. Always add concrete examples, stories, so people want to read.
5. Add a contact number to the press release so journalists can call someone + add a link to eg. a Google Drive folder with high resolution photos (include copyright in the titles of the photos).

Always start with a list

Editors and journalists are actually quite accessible. But it takes some effort to gather a list of journalists who would likely be covering the story.

Here's how to build a list of press contacts:

- Research papers, newssites and magazines for articles in your area or field of interest.
- Check which journalists regularly cover the theme environment.
- Search for their contact details by Googling their names.
- Send your press release to the list, but make sure to put all addresses in BCC.

Blogging & writing on your website



How does Google Search work?

Google filters through billions of pages on the internet and does so using the following 5 criteria: relevant, popular, unique, topical and qualitative results. To ensure your page is found by Google, the use of 'on page' factors is essential. On page factors are all the factors on your website itself that contribute to the search engine friendliness of your website, such as SEO.

How does SEO work?

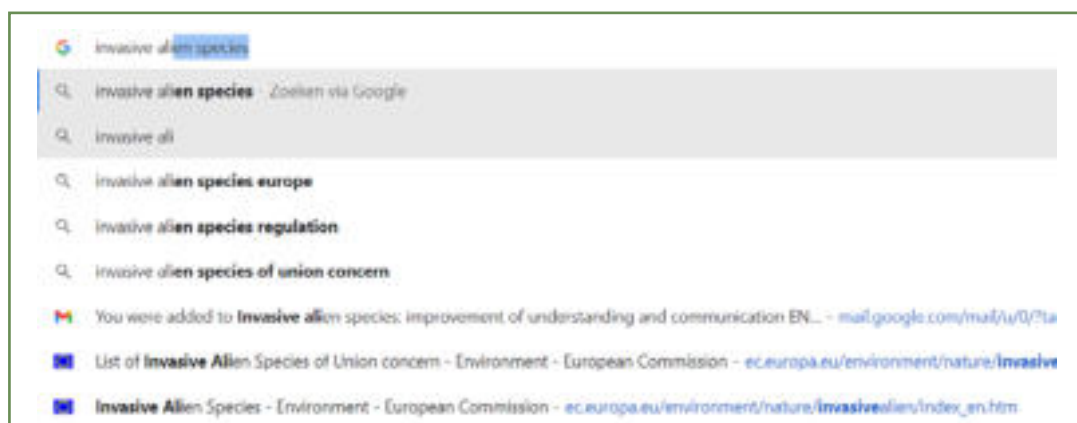
SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It means that the Search Engine - in this case: Google - shows your webpage in the search results when people look for information you provide. Your website must be relevant to a keyword search query. Suppose a prospect searches for 'invasive plant'. Google will select from all web pages those that are relevant to this keyword combination and then rank them. Does the term 'invasive plant' appear more than once on your site? Then the relevance already increases. Does the combination appear in key positions on your site or online article? Then that will make you even more relevant for Google.

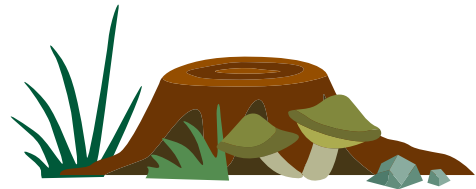
Looking for key words

Conduct a key words research: think about which 20 words are most important because people will search for them online. What do you think people type in when they search for information regarding invasive alien species? These words/terms could be e.g. *invasive plant*, *invasive animal*, *plant/animal threatening biodiversity*, *plant/animal damaging nature*, *biodiversity*, *protecting nature*, *being responsible towards nature*, ...

Need inspiration when looking for relevant keywords?

Use Google Suggest: Google is very good at providing related keywords. See below: these are the suggestions that Google iprovides when you enter a word or term in the search bar.





Writing for search

When writing articles on invasive alien species for a particular website, blog, web page, an online article,... know that *where you put keywords is important for your page or site to be found by Google Search.*

Use the keyword in the page title (= name of the page)

Use the keyword in the <h1> or so-called Heading 1 tag (also called Heading 1).

This is better known as the second title (if there is one)

Use the keyword – if possible - in the first paragraph of your article and preferably as the first word

Use the keyword also in any of the paragraph sub-titles

Use the keyword at least once per paragraph. Even better: make sure the keyword you want to be found on regularly recurs in the text of your entire article. But do not overkill: constantly repeating the keyword is not conducive to readability.

Do you use pics or illustrations? Use the keyword in the alt title of the image, in the image file name and in the caption.

Example: this is my first Google search result when searching online for *Invasive species*. Pay attention to the title and the first words of the paragraph. It's not a coincidence; the author clearly knows how SEO works.

The screenshot shows a website header for Wageningen University & Research. The main navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Crop protection and control of weeds and invasive plant', and 'Education & Research Programmes Results'. The page title is 'Invasive plant species'. The first paragraph of the article reads: 'Invasive plant species are species that do not naturally occur in the Netherlands. These exotics are usually brought into the country by human activity. This could be by accident, for example as part of a cargo from abroad, or intentional, such as the trade in exotic pond and garden plants. A small minority of exotics feel quite at home in their new environment, establish themselves permanently here and quickly multiply due to the lack of natural enemies such as bacteria, fungi, insects and competing plant species. Then we speak of invasive species. These species cause a lot of damage and nuisance because they are highly invasive and difficult to combat.'

Making use of rich content

The richer a page on your website is, the more valuable both your reader and Google will find it. By rich, we refer to multiple and different types of media you offer such as: text, blogs, testimonials, images, audio, video, pdf, infographics, polls, comments, internal links, outbound links, social media shares and so on. Images, for instance, add great extra SEO value to your content, especially since Google easily tracks your image. How does this work?

Example suppose you take a picture, the file name normally would be, for example, IMG057.jpg. Google doesn't understand this and hence, will therefore not push this as a search result. Instead, provide a good, descriptive file name for each illustration like: "invasive alien species - American bull frog". Chances are quite big if anybody searches for *bull frog, American bull frog, invasive frog, ... your picture will rank high in the search results.*

Keep a visitor on your website as long as possible (because Google also uses this 'dwelltime' as a signal to push the website among the search results). You can do this by putting podcasts, video clips on your site or integrate videos from your YouTube channel on the website. Google notices that this makes visitors stick around longer and pushes your site forward in search results.

Link as much as possible

You can connect multiple pages by using links or clickable words. By linking the pages of your site to other pages and to other, external sites, your site will also be found faster by Google because Google then sees your site as part of a bigger spider web, not as an isolated and meaningless site. This is why it is so important to place hyperlinks/clickable linking on your site.

Attract visitors to your site from your other channels as much as possible

Stimulate visitors to visit your website by leading them there from your Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn profile or newsletter. When a particular page on your website gets a lot of views or response, Google considers this a popularity indicator.

For example: you make a Facebook post about invasive alien species and you mention the EASIN project in your post by embedding a hyperlink to the EASIN website. The more people click on the hyperlink, the more they go to the EASIN site, the more popular that page will become and the faster Google will find it.

BEWARE OF ALIENS: Education & public speaking

The question is not: should I use the campaign in my presentations? The question is: why haven't you started using it yet?

It's perfectly possible to add one of the movies to your presentation, to highlight and repeat the key message, to add the visuals to a presentation about the actual impact and damage of invasive alien species or about scientific findings about invasions and risks.

TIP: It doesn't harm to add a concrete call to action for your audience too: to spread the word on THEIR socials, using the hashtag. They can take a picture of your slide and tweet it right away. Makes you happy & makes them happy, 'cause: together for healthy nature!

BEWARE OF ALIENS: Spread them posters!

When placed on a strategic location, the impact of a poster can be quite big. It's a good idea to get a list of places where your posters could reach the audience you want to target.

When hanging posters, it's worthwhile to get them printed professionally - rather than using the print-at-home version. But have a plan in place first, so you know who will hang how many posters & where, so you don't end up with boxes full of unused posters.

On the campaign website, you find two printable versions of each poster:

One format is aimed to 'home print' for anyone to hang at a window, in a shop, in a visitors center, in the locker room at work, etc.

The other format is suitable for professional printing. Organisations or companies can use this file to disseminate a large number of high quality posters to all their departments or divisions.

Tip: when you hang the posters, take a picture, make a video, etc. and post it on social media, with the hashtag #BewareOfAliens. That way, you get social attention for your paper posters in yet another way.







GET STARTED

Let's go ahead!

Make a social media calendar in a spreadsheet, where you write down

- when you are going to post (e.g. twice a week)
- what you are going to post (e.g. soil visual, forest visitor movie, ...)
- On what channel (Insta, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- And which caption, hashtags and Call To Action you'll add.

Always add #BewareOfAliens

Head to the website and download the materials in your languages. You've got plenty of visuals to choose from. Will you focus on one audience? Or are you going to raise awareness on all topics? Make your choice!

- Schedule your posts or post them as you go along.
- On Instagram, follow the hashtag #BewareOfAliens, so you can see how others are doing.
- Like, share and comment on the posts of your fellow campaigners.

Let's do this!



Together for healthy nature

Material developed with European Commission funding for contract
"Invasive alien species: improvement of understanding and communication"



#BewareOfAliens

—
[tinyurl.com/
bewareofaliens](https://tinyurl.com/bewareofaliens)
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