Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges

The challenges we face are tough and complex in a multi-faceted, fast-paced, always-on, interconnected world. We are overshadowed by armed conflict, political and social polarization, misinformation and disinformation. Technology is advancing at lightning speed, changing the way businesses, societies and individuals communicate.

Together with some of Europe's leading communication professionals we are exploring the application of intelligence and creativity in devising solutions to the challenges we face.

Summary

Welcome to the relaunch of the Communication Director Magazine!

I am very pleased to introduce this first edition, a testament to the resilience, innovation, and dedication of our community of communication directors. Given the shape of the world and our role as communicators, the insights and expertise shared within these pages are more valuable than ever.

In this special relaunch edition, you will find diverse and useful insight on a range of topics from top contributors including:

- **Jennifer Sanchis** from Carma who delves into the intricacies of representing high-profile organizations, emphasizing the importance of strategic communication and adaptability.
- **Carina Hauswald** discusses the role of communication in building confident organizations, highlighting the need for authentic leadership and inclusive communication cultures.
- **Fiona Robertson** poses a thought-provoking question: «Is the comms playbook being re-written?» Her insights into the evolving landscape of integrity and trust are particularly timely.
- **Shahar Silbershatz** addresses the pressing need for companies to be more honest and human in their communications to protect their reputations in today's volatile environment.
- **Maria Gatón Fraile** explores the challenges and opportunities presented by AI, urging us to embrace creativity while navigating regulatory landscapes.
- **Bjørn Arild Thon** advocates for a shift from climate change rhetoric to a focus on the circular economy, a perspective that resonates deeply with our commitment to sustainability.
- **Olga Rudnieva's** poignant piece on Ukraine's transformation into a country of superhumans is a powerful reminder of the human spirit's resilience.
- **Dan Drury** provides a strategic guide to combating misinformation and disinformation in the AI age, emphasizing the importance of trust and authenticity.
- **Roger Bolton's** article on multistakeholder value creation underscores the critical role of communication in driving societal impact.
- **Vanya Babanin** offers a roadmap for navigating complexity, while **Bisera Savoska** highlights the potential of AI to create inclusive digital communities.
- Finally, **Sophie Drummond's** eulogy for traditional internal comms challenges us to rethink our approaches in an era of transparency and employee empowerment.

This edition builds on our EACD Summit theme: Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges. I have heard great feedback about the Summit and we share our community's view that it was a resounding success. We were able to bring together Europe's leading communication professionals to explore new horizons and create meaningful connections. At the Summit, we launched our mentorship program, Connector, which is another exciting development. Connector fosters professional growth and knowledge exchange across our community. Get in touch to find out more!

In fact, as we continue to grow and evolve, I encourage all members to get involved. Share your ideas for articles, engage with our community, and help shape the future of communication. Your contributions are invaluable, and together, we can drive excellence in our profession.

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our long-time partner, Carma, for their unwavering support in making the relaunch of this magazine possible. Their commitment to our community is deeply appreciated. Let's embrace this new chapter for the EACD with enthusiasm and a shared commitment to excellence. I look forward to your active participation and to the many exciting developments ahead.

Warm regards,

Kim Larsen
President, European Association of Communication Directors

Jennifer
Sanchis

Insights Consultant at CARMA

Having studied Journalism, PR and Crisis Comms, Jennifer is passionate about PR research. At CARMA, she provides strategic guidance on gold award-winning global measurement and evaluation programmes. She is one of the best young talents in the industry - in 2023, AMEC awarded her Young Professional of the Year and in 2019, the CIPR East Anglia named her Outstanding Young Communicator. Outside of her day-to-day job, she volunteers at the CIPR Greater London group as a Committee member and is a member of AMEC's Academics and Educators special interest group.

Do you have what it takes to represent high-profile organisations?

By **Jennifer Sanchis**, Insights Consultant at **CARMA**

As PR practitioners, many of us have dreamt of working with prestigious institutions and representing high-profile organisations in the public eye. We imagine glamourous collaborations with prominent figures and celebrities, defining campaigns that change perceptions and society profoundly, managing an ever-changing media narrative and advising on influential societal matters. But is it as thrilling as it sounds? What are the challenges you must face? And more importantly, what does it take to reach this level?

Last year, CIPR London brought Simon Enright, Chair of Freuds Advisory and former Communications Director of NHS England and Communications Secretary to HM King Charles, together with YolanDa Brown OBE, DL, an artist, broadcaster, music venue owner and Chair of the BPI to explore this topic.

Behind the headlines and fanfare, they discussed the intricacies of communications in the public eye, shedding light on their experiences with two of the most famous British institutions during a time of unprecedented change.

From the lessons learned during the pandemic to insights into the role of communications secretary for a royal household, they provided valuable perspectives on planning, executing and measuring effective communications strategies.

The Importance of Profile Building

Emphasising the significance of "building profile" when starting a career or any PR campaign or initiative, the discussion raised an intriguing question: When working for an organisation that already enjoys a significant profile, where does one begin?

The answer to this lies in understanding what can and cannot be achieved, and aligning the communication efforts with the client's interests. An example was provided, showcasing the years of ground-breaking work done by HM King Charles that focused on tasks related to the environment. This involved influential figures in promoting the royals' commitment to environmental causes.

It all begins with a great communications plan, clear objectives and the following questions: What are you known for? What defines you? What do you want to be known for? Then, identifying the 'white gaps' will help you to identify the right opportunities.

Adapting to a Changing Communications Landscape

The impact of significant events such as COVID-19, Brexit or the coronation of HM King Charles on public perceptions and relationships was highlighted. Another crucial change discussed was how the modern world allows individuals to pursue multiple passions, leading to messier communications landscapes.

"It all begins with a great communications plan.„

To tackle these challenges, adaptability is key, as well as being able to maintain a clear focus and to define the core of one's work. The importance of proper monitoring, analysis and insights of traditional and social media was emphasised in enabling effective reputation awareness and management by staying abreast of conversations and potential issues.

The Power of Relatable Campaigns

What is the secret to a great campaign going viral? A successful example focusing on the NHS COVID vaccination campaign was shared. One key element of its profound impact was the involvement of ordinary people rather than relying solely on celebrities, politicians or influencers. The impact of a viral image, depicting **an elderly woman receiving the vaccine**, was highlighted, demonstrating the importance of relatable and authentic storytelling.

When it comes to navigating communications in high-profile organisations, it can be acknowledged that this task is not without its challenges. It requires individuals with strong resolve, the ability to create authentic campaigns and a deep understanding of the profound impact of today's increased media scrutiny.

With the right monitoring and analysis tools, a clear strategy from the start and a proper plan, understanding audiences, adapting to an ever-changing world and focusing on audience engagement remain crucial in successfully conveying the right message, to the right people, to change perceptions and influence behaviours.

And this, dear communicators, should apply whether you work for the smallest organisation, a critical national health service or even a king!

Monitor what matters
Measure what's meaningful
Demonstrate the value of PR

At CARMA, we believe that you cannot be the guardian of your organization's reputation if you do not monitor and measure the effectiveness of your communications program.

Strategic planning is essential for improving the effectiveness of PR efforts. CARMA not only enables you to focus on complete monitoring across all traditional, search, digital, and social channels but also helps you plan more strategically through analysis. Our advanced methodology integrates world-class reputational, messaging, and stakeholder metrics, to deliver what matters.

CARMA

carma.com
twitter.com/CARMA
linkedin.com/company/CARMA

Carina **Hauswald**

Managing Partner at Globeone

Carina Hauswald is Managing Partner at Globeone, an international Boutique Management Consultancy that helps global clients on their transformation journeys. She is a brand strategist and communication expert with a special interest in B2B brands and their complex ecosystems. Prior to Globeone, she worked for international agency networks and on corporate site.

The role of communication in building confident organizations

By **Carina Hauswald**, Managing Partner at **Globeone**

In a world marked by massive change and unpredictability, organizations are facing unprecedented challenges on multiple fronts. Whether it's the impact of geopolitical- or climate-change-driven events, rapid technological advancements, or shifting consumer behaviors, the ability to navigate and shape change has become paramount for organizational success.

In this dynamic landscape, the concept of a confident organization emerges as a fundamental cornerstone for resilience and innovation. Confidence empowers individuals and organizations to not only weather storms but also break through barriers and bridge divides. This confidence is not a self-fulfilling prophecy; rather, it is cultivated and nurtured through effective communication. As communication professionals, we hold a unique position in shaping and equipping self-confident leaders, fostering team and system confidence, and building external reputation. Sheryl Sandberg, speaking at Harvard Business School, highlighted the critical role of authentic communication as the linchpin that inspires and guides organizations towards success: "Your strength will not come from your place on some organization chart. Your strength will come from building trust and earning respect. You're going to need talent, skill, imagination, and vision, but more than anything else, you're going to need the ability to communicate authentically, to speak so that you inspire the people around you. You must also listen so that you continue to learn every day on the job."

As communication leaders, we need to initiate conversations that enable leaders and organizations to become more confident. How do we do that?

Cultivating Self-Confident Leaders

Confident organizations begin with self-confident leaders. Effective communication plays a crucial role in cultivating this self-assuredness, and one cannot overstate its significance. Effective communication empowers leaders to articulate a clear vision, convey commitment, and engage authentically with their teams and across the organization.

Building Blocks:

- **Authentic Leadership Communication:** Encourage leaders to be authentic in their communication — sharing their values, beliefs, and vulnerabilities in context. Authenticity fosters trust and enables leaders to appear more approachable to their teams by allowing them to express their human side.
- **Clarity and Consistency:** Assist leaders in crafting clear and consistent messages that resonate with their vision. Consistency in communication reinforces trust and confidence in leadership.
- **Planning and training:** We often expect leaders to be good communicators, but forget that most need to be inspired themselves, need a communication plan with some cornerstones to follow, and need training. And we have an important role to play here.

Fostering Team and System Confidence

Confidence extends beyond individual leaders; it encompasses teams and entire organizational systems. Effective communication plays a pivotal role in fostering confidence at these levels. Teams that feel heard, valued, and informed are more likely to perform at their best.

Building Blocks:

- **Purpose:** Take purpose development, communication, and anchoring seriously and as important means of providing meaning, alignment, and orientation. Don't make it an advertising jargon exercise, but a tough conversation — especially at top and middle management levels.
- **Inclusive Communication:** Promote an inclusive communication culture in which diverse voices are not only welcomed but actively sought out and respected. Inclusivity builds trust among team members and enhances their confidence in the team's collective abilities.

- **Emotional Communication, Transparency, and Openness:** Encourage transparency in communication, especially when addressing challenges or setbacks. Openness about organizational realities fosters a culture of honesty and trust.
- **Accountability:** Train yourself and your teams to work together with a mindset of joint ownership and the skills to deliver on that.

Building External Reputation

A confident organization does not operate in isolation; it interacts with external stakeholders including potential talents, customers, partners, investors, and the public. Communication is the bridge that translates and connects the internal confidence of an organization with its external reputation.

Building Blocks:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Facilitate proactive engagement with stakeholders to build relationships based on trust and transparency. Engaged stakeholders are more likely to support and advocate for the organization.
- **Crisis Communication:** Prepare the organization for crisis situations through effective communication planning. The ability to navigate and communicate through crises reinforces external confidence in the organization's resilience.

"Confidence empowers individuals and organizations to not only weather storms but also break through barriers and bridge divides."

Our Responsibility as Communication Directors

As Communication Directors, we bear a responsibility for driving the organization toward confidence. Our role extends beyond crafting messages and managing channels; it encompasses strategic leadership in communication. Here are some key responsibilities and conversations we must initiate:

1. **Strategic Alignment:** Ensure that communication strategies are aligned with the organization's overall strategic objectives. Effective communication should not be an isolated function but an integral part of the organization's strategic roadmap.
2. **Listening and Feedback:** Create mechanisms for listening to the voices of employees and other stakeholders. Act on feedback to address concerns and demonstrate a commitment to improvement.
3. **Advocacy for Authenticity:** Advocate for and support leaders in embracing authenticity in their communication. Encourage them to share stories of pride, of opportunities, challenges, resilience, and growth.
4. **Investing in Communication Skills and Business Acumen:** Recognize the importance of communication skills development paired with business understanding at all levels of the organization. Training and coaching can empower employees to communicate effectively, fostering confidence from within.

5. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Leverage data and analytics to measure the impact of communication efforts. Data provides valuable insights for continuous improvement and informed decision making. Let's have the confidence to state that communication is an art and a science, and its orchestration needs competence, courage, and empathy.
6. **Promoting a Culture of Communication:** Foster a culture in which communication is valued and seen as a strategic asset. Encourage cross-functional collaboration and the sharing of best practices.

In conclusion, the role of communication in building confident organizations cannot be overstated. Confidence is the catalyst for resilience, innovation, and progress. As Communication Directors, our mission is clear: to cultivate self-confident leaders, foster team and system confidence, and build an external reputation that creates value for the organization. By embracing authenticity, contextual transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in our communication strategies, and by championing a purpose-driven culture, we can support our organizations in the face of an ever-changing world.
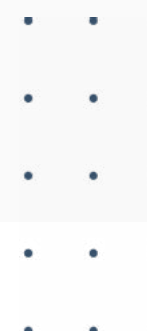
Fiona **Robertson**

Founder & Director, Truth be told

Fiona is an experienced communications adviser and strategist with a 15-year corporate career that involved managing communications through times of immense change, challenge and opportunity. Fiona has extensive experience across corporate affairs, internal communications, sustainability and customer communications. Fiona founded Truth be told in 2022: A strategic communications consultancy with a purpose to co-create environments where businesses communicate with honesty and integrity. Truth be told has worked across the financial services, renewable energy, food & drink and professional services sectors to support clients with their communication and engagement

Is the comms playbook being re-written?

By **Fiona Robertson**, Founder & Director of **Truth be told**

We are living in a time when integrity is constantly being called into question, but where society is often polarised about how integrity is defined. Many of the systems we're working in are not yet designed for the world we live in or the way we will live. The pace of change is extraordinary. Much of what is happening is messy, uncertain and grave.

But we're also in an era of experimentation and excitement, with great potential and new opportunities. And despite calls for the need to do more, it's worth remembering that we're experiencing an unprecedented worldwide focus on wellbeing, diversity and sustainability.

We are living through an era of transition on multiple levels, from micro shifts in our daily lives to macro shifts on a global stage. Companies and leaders are being presented with communications choices that range from the seemingly impossible right through to the euphoric.

The ability to build and retain trust through a commitment to truth and authenticity will be the leader and communicator's superpower. The level of uncertainty must be balanced by a reliability and integrity that people can count on.

Understand the environment you're working in

The world is a smaller place now. We're more connected, more visible and more accountable *in plain sight*. Audiences are diverse and global, with a spectrum of views.

We have a choice of how we engage with and respond to our environment. We're in an experimental phase, and facing this with an open mind is essential.

If you're at a loss as to why someone feels a certain way or makes certain choices, the first step is to get to know your audience. Understand what they believe, what they read, where they spend time locally and online. Familiarise yourself with different media and alternative views.

We can no longer exist in echo chambers, deeply committed to our favourite news outlet or podcast that simply reflect our own views back to us on a daily basis. We don't have to agree, but we do need to understand the broader picture.

This will help us develop the level of discernment needed to judge what to say and when. In times of global crises there are moments when you must speak up, but other times there's a responsibility to stay grounded in why you matter and where you can have an impact. Retaining that focus for your customers, clients, colleagues, investors and other stakeholders helps to demonstrate that you're in control of steering the ship while the world seems to be at sea.

Embracing *Adapted Leadership* can help us support the systems changes we need to make; where we all recognise the fluidity of the world we live in. We must be able to flex, adapt and continue on a path of growth. This is true for us all – whether you're leading a team, your own company, or yourself. And to all those changemakers out there: Keep going! And leaders: Please support them – it's not always easy to be the one pushing for a different way of thinking.

Put your arms around experimentation but stay grounded and focused on your path through change.

Show up as yourself – lead with honesty

In a world of Kim Scott's *Radical Candour*, the case has been made for an honest and supportive approach to communications and change. Facilitating an environment in which you're **truly open** to exploring approaches and ideas with others is how we can deliver the best solutions.

When working with clients, I'm totally committed to bringing out their essence and truth in a way that's authentic and aligned with why they matter, who they matter to and how best to engage with those stakeholders. With a name like **Truth be told,** my business is all about this.

It doesn't involve force or pushing for one particular version of the outcome or process; it involves working together to really understand what the story is and why it's relevant. People feel the pull of truth, and can usually detect messages that do not come from a place of belief and integrity.

But all this is becoming more of a challenge in a world of conflicting perspectives and fake news, and stories move fast. You may not always have a chance to establish control of the narrative. Therefore, being open and upfront about an upcoming opportunity, problem or change works best. We're all human and we're all adults – so treat people as you would like to be treated.

Transparency done well is about knowing your audience and understanding the effect that news will have on them. It doesn't mean sharing everything all of the time, but instead using a measured approach to being open and honest at the right time with the right information.

The *Harvard Business Review* explored executive presence in the new era. The top-two traits remained 'superior 'communications skills' and 'command of a room/zoom', respectively. But other communication priorities showed notable evolution during the 2012 to 2022 survey period: 'listen to learn' (rather than 'forcefulness') is now ranked as a top-three leadership skill, with 'authenticity' replacing a 'joking/bantering manner' in fifth place.

My advice to leaders and communicators is: Be you, remember the ground rules, stay focused, embrace change and be open to different perspectives.

Human sustainability in the AI age

The AI debate is in full flow, and it's incredible to see the opportunities this can create for companies and society. It's important to encourage this new age and adopt experimentation to remain relevant and allow creativity to blossom. AI technologies are tools we can use to help us all create more value for our customers and stakeholders. Integrating this into how you work and serve customers will be transformative.

As humans, we are inherently unique, resulting in infinite choices about how we power AI. It is a supporter and generator of creativity and change, and you can choose which direction to take it. It's time to use – not lose – your personality. Your distinctive view, and how you encourage that in others, will be what differentiates you from the rest.

Therefore, human sustainability needs to be at the forefront of your mind – for customers, colleagues and partners. How are you looking after them? How can AI work in ways that are additive, save time, build resilience and reduce stress by removing friction from our lives?

We're at a time when the much-quoted (and rightly so) Carol S. Dweck's *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential* isn't just a book on our shelves but a way of working. By applying Dweck's growth mindset in workplaces in a way that works for individual as well as vocational learning, we can build workplaces that foster regenerative growth. Where people feel more fulfilled and better equipped for their roles in life and work. Rather than burned out and in recovery mode.

Being explicit about this will help us all engage positively and openly with AI and other new technologies whilst paying attention to our digital wellbeing – we can be both addicted to existing within digital spaces yet at the same time isolated. Channel the human perspective, and use yours.

> **"We live in an uncertain world, in which familiar frameworks, dynamics and mechanisms are changing."**

Is the comms playbook being re-written?

We live in an uncertain world, in which familiar frameworks, dynamics and mechanisms are changing.

But do we need to rip up the playbook? I don't think so.

More than ever, the fundamentals of communications remain. If anything, 'bad habits' – of making assumptions about your audience, not embracing change and not being open and honest in a way that helps those receiving the communication – will rightfully be called out.

The world is changing, but we remain human beings who inhabit the same planet. Show up as you; Understand your audience, and create human connection wherever possible. It will be worth it.

2024 is a record election year, when it is expected that 42% of the world's population will vote on a government of their choice. As the world re-shapes itself politically, we will continue to experience shifts and shocks. Beyond the binary positioning of right vs left, this will trigger a multi-faceted impact as relationships and agreements are redefined globally.

Fortune favours the brave, but also the prepared mind.

There will be further disruption, and the unexpected – even unthinkable – may still happen. But this builds the case for (not against) more connected communications.

At the recent EACD crisis communications webinar, a new title of Chief Connections Officer was suggested. I would tweak this to the 'Everyday Connector' and have it in everyone's remit so we can all learn from each other and embrace experimentation. Always with a commitment to the truth.

Top tips – your playbook toolbox

- **Rise above, with truth and authenticity:** In an uncertain and 'deep fake' world, build trust and engagement in a way that adds value. Don't confuse through too much information. Retain clarity, and stay grounded in who needs to know what.

- **Listen to learn**: Retain human connection in a way that works for your audience and your style. If you can't get together in person, ditch screen-sharing and slides: Make eye contact through the lens, and have a conversation.

- **Be curious:** It's okay not to have all the answers, but it's not okay to make assumptions and think your view of the world is always the right one. Explore different views and media.

- **Work with technology, not against it:** Technology is here to stay and is constantly evolving; We won't be replaced by it, but our lives will change and can be enhanced by it. Don't be afraid to experiment.

- **Embrace the changemakers:** Don't let them run out of steam or go it alone when advocating a different approach. Open up to their guidance and embark on a journey of exploration and discovery. Now is the time.

- **The fundamentals work:** Be open and honest, with confidence. Prepare your audience for what is to come. If things are going horribly wrong and you're facing a potential crisis, make a judgement call on what you can share with those who will be impacted most. They will thank you in the aftermath.

References

- Dr Carol S. Dweck. Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential.
- Sylvia Ann Hewlett. The New Rules of Executive Presence. Harvard Business Review.
- Kim Scott. Radical Candour: How to Get What You Want by Saying What You Mean.
- World Economic Forum. 2024 is a Record Year for Elections. Here's What You Need to Know.

EACD
EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION
DIRECTORS

Connector – The EACD Mentorship Program

Interested in connecting with fellow EACD members and participating in our mentorship program as a mentor or mentee?

Scan the QR code and join Connector.

eacd-online.eu

Shahar Silbershatz

CEO of Caliber

As CEO of Caliber, a Copenhagen-based stakeholder intelligence firm, Shahar helps organizations build trust through providing a mix of strategic consulting, stakeholder insights and digital solutions. He has an MBA from Columbia Business School and over 20 years of experience working at leading consultancies in New York, London and Copenhagen – advising some of the world's largest companies in the areas of marketing, communications, business strategy and stakeholder relations. Shahar's activity in the areas of reputation management and corporate branding extends to public speaking in industry events, publication of thought leadership and guest lecturing at academic institutions like the Danish Institute for Study Abroad, Copenhagen Business School, Quadriga University in Berlin and Erasmus University Rotterdam.

To protect their reputation today, companies must be more honest and human

By **Shahar Silbershatz**, CEO of **Caliber**

The headlines come thick and fast.

Militants step up their attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, disrupting global supply chains. Voters elect a demagogic presidential candidate, fuelling social unrest and concerns about impacts on cross-border trade, security and the climate. Amid accusations that it's gone "woke", a corporation pulls a major ad campaign. And hacktivists exploit artificial intelligence to create a devastating series of "deep fake" corporate videos.

Welcome to the world in 2024. A world seemingly beset by endless crises, "culture wars" and the nefarious use of AI. All three issues pose serious challenges to corporate communicators. Here's why.

Take AI, which lies behind the increasing spread of mis- and disinformation. Deep fakes — such as bogus ads, photos or videos — will increasingly compromise more companies and threaten their reputations. And "malgorithms" that place company ads in inappropriate places will likewise raise **red flags concerning brand suitability.**

Meanwhile, some companies will suffer AI-related security breaches such as data leaks. Others will see algorithmic biases roll back their hard-won diversity and inclusion gains. Then there's the broader impact of AI on society: Businesses that **replace employees with AI** and put many people **out of work** may suffer reputational harm.

The second threat to corporate reputations is geopolitical turmoil — or, rather, the seemingly relentless stream of macro-events sometimes known as the "**polycrisis**". Many companies will face a sudden, specific crisis this year — such as an armed conflict or environmental disaster that threatens supply chains or endangers employees. They will need to respond quickly — and must do so these days with the world looking on. What's also different now is that even if they aren't affected, companies are increasingly **expected to take a stand** in response to a crisis (such as the Israel-Hamas war).

That brings us to the third major threat to corporate reputation and challenge for corporate communicators: culture wars.

In today's always-on, interconnected world, businesses are increasingly drawn into ideological battles over hot-button issues like race, gender, climate and geopolitics. And, as the media, legislator, and investor-led **backlash against ESG** and "woke" activity shows, companies are discovering they can't please all their stakeholders all the time. Simply ask either Anheuser-Busch or Disney, both of which discovered the reputational cost of speaking out about controversial topics.

Potential flashpoints will only grow in what's expected to be another divisive election year in the United States — with possible consequences for European companies, too.

But what makes the coming months so parlous is that these three threats overlap. A company that engages in "greenhushing" — not mentioning its sustainability activities to sidestep the ESG backlash — may inadvertently create an information vacuum. The result? Some actors may draw inaccurate conclusions about the company, while others may fill the void with harmful deep fakes. Both circumstances can erode stakeholder trust and damage the company's reputation.

A company's failure to speak out about a major global event can create a similar void — one that's ripe for disinformation, misinformation and misinterpretation.

So how can companies protect themselves against these three threats?

Here are four strategies.

Be authentic

Stakeholders will increasingly value companies that act and speak authentically.

This applies whether the company faces a crisis — like a disrupted supply chain or a data leak — or increasing demands to address a hot-button issue. Either way, authenticity here isn't about meeting an exacting external standard.

Rather, it means that what the company says or does — how it responds to a crisis, the causes it supports and who represents it — all clearly align with its values and purpose.

Too many companies get this wrong and jump on a bandwagon to impress certain stakeholders, only to alienate others by appearing insincere or inauthentic.

In 2024, companies should seek to be more authentic — and let their core values guide their decisions.

Be honest

As Budweiser and Disney can attest, companies don't always please everyone — and anything that smacks of inauthenticity can cause reputational damage. By the same token, just as authenticity resonates with stakeholders, so does **honesty**.

So, to protect their reputation in 2024, companies shouldn't just stand up for their beliefs and remain loyal to their values. They should also try to explain what they're doing, why they're doing it and how it'll affect stakeholders.

Likewise, if they choose not to take a position, they should explain why — clearly, honestly and sincerely.

Either way, the aim should be to take a position that's aligned with their values and purpose — and then to communicate this clearly and honestly.

Be human

Companies looking to protect their reputation in 2024 should also strive to be as relatable — if not as human — as possible.

That is, they should employ not so much artificial intelligence as **emotional intelligence**. In the age of AI, this may mean having **real people communicate with customers** — and fostering real relationships with them.

But it will also be about prioritizing soft skills such as empathy — and being **more responsive** to the needs of customers, employees and other stakeholders.

A recent case in point? David Calhoun, Boeing's CEO, **responding** to the near-catastrophic blow-out of a

section of an Alaska Airlines 737 Max-9 plane: "I didn't know what had happened to whoever was supposed to be in the seat next to that hole in the airplane…" he told Boeing employees at a 737 factory. "…I got kids. I got grandkids, and so do you." Owning up to Boeing's mistakes and promising complete transparency, Calhoun added: "We need to know we're starting from a very anxious moment with our customers."

Be always on

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by today's lightning-fast world — especially if you work in communications. Responses always seem to have been due five minutes ago; opinions change like the wind; and, as we've already noted, companies must pick their battles wisely.

But one answer to the always-on, interconnected world we live in is to embrace it. To fight fire with fire.

Simply put, companies must be alert and agile in how they detect and respond to relevant developments. Being alert means keeping a finger on the pulse at all times — for example, by using intelligence-gathering tools that are themselves always on and which produce data about stakeholders in real time. Being agile means reacting quickly, using up-to-date information and efficient internal processes that allow rapid decisions on the most appropriate course of action.

For those looking to navigate cultural divisions or mitigate a crisis, this may mean plugging into data tools and employing analytical skills that facilitate data-driven communications. Not only will this advance the communication function on its never-ending quest to prove its ROI, but it will also help the company understand its audience better, communicate more effectively and build trust.

Data-driven communication isn't a silver bullet, of course.

Neither are authenticity, honesty and relatability.

Together, though, they offer optimal protection against reputational harm in the age of ongoing geopolitical crises, partisan culture wars and the unethical use of AI.

"What's also different now is that even if they aren't affected, companies are increasingly expected to take a stand in response to a crisis."

Maria
Gatón Fraile

Communications Consultant

Maria Gaton Fraile is a Communications and Public Affairs consultant in Brussels, having worked as a Communications and Public Affairs professional for the EU Telecom Regulators, ICOM (International Council of Museums), Council of Europe, European Commission, Sanofi-Aventis, TUI Travel, the banking sector, the fashion sector, academia etc. in different parts of the world.

AI is challenging us: room for creativity

By **Maria Gatón Fraile**, Communications Consultant

With the exponential development of AI – the most powerful technology of our times – and the huge number of sectors where it is and will be implemented, risk areas have emerged that prompted governments to start thinking of how best to regulate AI while also empowering technological evolution. The International Monetary Fund estimates that almost 40% of jobs worldwide are exposed to AI, increasing to 60% in advanced economies. Institutions such as the European Union, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and **OECD** continue to work on the best framework for optimising AI while at the same time protecting citizens. On February 2nd 2024, the provisional text was agreed for the proposed **EU AI Act**. This followed hard negotiations amongst Member States with differing perspectives on the extent of regulation and the future space for manoeuvre for this new and fast-evolving technology.

The EU Parliament adopted the AI Act in March 2024 while the Council of the European Union (EU) announced the final approval of the landmark EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) on May 21 2024 Commissioner Breton stated "Europe is speaking with one voice on AI". The AI Act will be fully applicable 24 months after entry into force, though some parts will be applicable sooner. The EU has established several governing bodies for enforcement amongst which is the European AI Office that will be the centre of AI expertise across the EU, playing a key role in implementing the AI Act and fostering the development and use of trustworthy AI, and its international cooperation". Representing the Council of the European Union, Mathieu Michel, Belgian secretary of state for digitisation stated "With the AI act, Europe emphasizes the importance of trust, transparency and accountability when dealing with new technologies while at the same time ensuring this fast-changing technology can flourish and boost European innovation".

The EU AI Act is combined with plans for huge investment, public–private partnerships, sandboxes for companies, and harmonised standardisation, which will involve industry. Both the European Commission and EU Member States will have roles in enforcement. Věra Jourová (European Commission Vice President for Values and Transparency) stated at Davos that: Europe requires a lot of creativity, even optimism, looking at AI in all sectors and fields — private and public. AI promises many potential benefits; as such, regulation is a prerequisite intended to mitigate related risks while not hampering creativity and positive thinking. Europe is well placed for this task: The EU is in continuous dialogue with the US, and there is space for highly interesting cooperation with the G7, **UNESCO**, UN, etc. Further to the Act, the EU will begin very intense cooperation involving the public sphere and the technology and research sectors.

In the US context, Arati Prabhakar, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, provided assurances that AI is of enormous priority, and that the US has a clear interest in worldwide developments in AI regulation. President Biden signed an Executive Order on AI in October 2023, and asked Congress to act on privacy legislation. Dr Prabhakar emphasised that: "everyone shares a sense of urgency. What has happened in the last year has focused everyone's attention on how pervasive AI is going to be in everyone's lives in so many ways. There will be places where harmonization can occur, and we're working towards it. It becomes clear that all countries will compete economically, and therefore there will be geopolitical and strategic competition that's based on AI".

Josephine Teo, Singapore Minister for Communications and Information, stressed how the interest in AI extends beyond regulation or governance — to enabling infrastructure to support AI's deployment and development: "You need to be able to build capabilities within the enterprise sector as well as individuals. And then you need to talk about international cooperation in regulations and laws [...] The European AI Act is looking at the fundamental rights of European citizens, the values of Europe, privacy, the protection of consumers, democratic rights, while the US Executive Order is looking at the application layer. Then you have the **G7 Hiroshima** process and the **UN Advisory Board**, all laddering up in a way that makes a lot of sense. So, it doesn't mean that we'll have a world without divergence, but we first have to recognise what people care about, to have some similar approaches to addressing them. Nevertheless, a lot of alignment and harmonisation is happening".

Paolo Benanti is an advisor to the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian government, the author of **"Homo Faber: The Techno-Human Condition",** and teaches moral theology and ethics (in a course titled "The Fall of Babel: The Challenges of Digital, Social Networks and Artificial Intelligence") at Rome's Gregorian University. At a conference organised by the **Order of Malta**, he told a group of ambassadors that: "global governance is needed, otherwise the risk is social collapse", and pointed out the delicate relationship between humanity and AI.

On the other hand, the G7 Leaders gathered in Apulia 13-15 June, received the 1st visit of a Pope to a G7 event. The Pope stated "Political leaders have a responsibility to create the conditions necessary for artificial intelligence to be at the service of humanity and to help mitigate its risks." "We cannot allow a tool as powerful and indispensable as artificial intelligence to reinforce such a (technocratic) paradigm, but rather, we must make artificial intelligence a bulwark" "This is precisely where political action is urgently needed," he said.

The G7 in their statement reinforced this idea stating they are "deepening our cooperation to harness the benefits and manage the risks of Artificial Intelligence. We will launch an action plan on the use of AI in the world of work and develop a brand to support the implementation of the International Code of Conduct for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems".

On the impact of AI in the advertising and media sector, Martin Sorrell, founder of WPP, the world's largest advertising and PR group as of 2019, stated: "...all these technologies, including the metaverse, will affect visualisation and copywriting and it will affect hyper personalisation at scale, particularly with the application of third-party cookies, which will be implemented by the end of this year. Most clients are not ready for that because they haven't refined their first-party data for it". Regarding the impact on media planning and buying: "...huge changes are going to take place. You won't need 250,000 people to implement media planning and buying across the world. There are AI broadcasting initiatives at AWS, Amazon and Adobe, which effectively reduces the cost of an outside broadcast by 90%. Thinking about the application of these technologies, we'll start to get the use cases that are vital". He also emphasised the need to develop and define use cases for major digital transformation in a world with slower growth, and higher inflation and interest rates: "We need to focus on geographies where there's growth, to minimise cost and be more efficient. Metaverse has already some case studies, and we must propagate it and show people the efficiencies".

The regulatory scope is clearly a strategic pillar. Brittan Heller, Technology and Human Rights Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School, commented at Davos how privacy law, as it is traditionally understood, is not a clean fit for all types of AI technology, with fundamental differences, for example, between biometric data (which is legally defined) versus body-based data (which currently lacks a legal definition). Eye-tracking can provide highly personal information on one's identity, medical conditions, or truthfulness. That's the quality information that is being disclosed, but that does not mean it is actively used by companies; We do not want to cause alarm, but this is the information that's in there. Privacy law is not covered by biometrics, and does not necessarily protect us in ways we assume that it might; Heller also noted: «There is just the first case opened in the UK, about a reported sexual assault in a virtual world".

However, there is optimism in this complex panorama, as Brad Smith, Vice Chair and President at Microsoft, stated: "...there are some areas that are universally shared values, even in a world that's so divided. No government wants machines to start the next war. And every country wants humanity to remain in control of this technology".

On the AI business panorama, the big will probably get bigger: Apple with Vision Pro; Microsoft and Nvidia, Salesforce, Oracle, and Adobe are all going to be big players. Nevertheless, clearly there is business space for all, and the sector will grow exponentially. AI is coming to stay: Its vision, plus issues of geopolitics, human rights, financial aspects, and the business side will all play a major role in this new technological revolution that will impact humanity in the coming years.
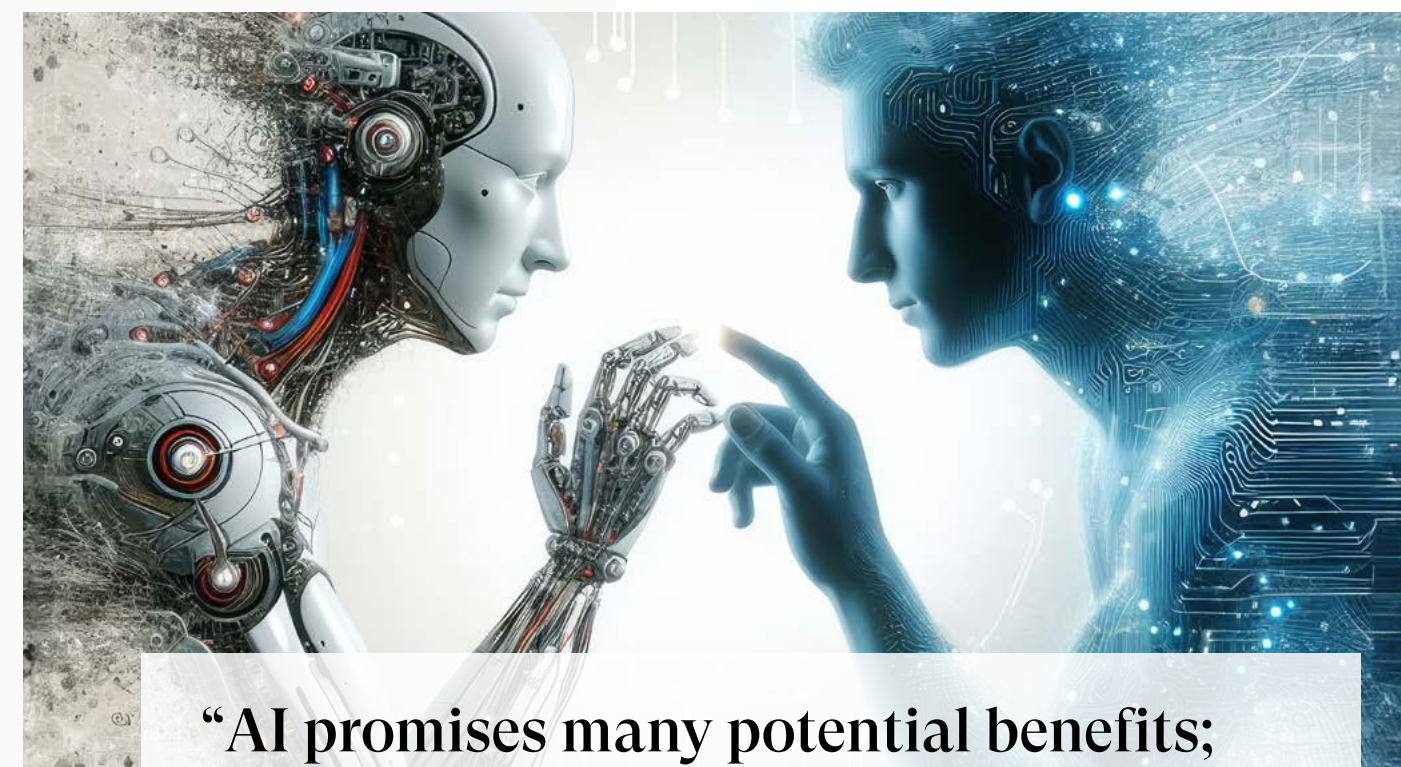
> "AI promises many potential benefits; as such, regulation is a prerequisite intended to mitigate related risks while not hampering creativity and positive thinking."

Bjørn Arild Thon

CEO at RENAS and Author, "Let's Get Practical"

Bjørn Arild Thon is an influential advocate for the circular economy and CEO of RENAS, Norway's leading electronic waste recycling organization, dedicated to integrating sustainable principles into business and policy. His initiatives include founding Circular Norway and supporting innovative platforms like Redoit, aimed at valuing materials and promoting reuse. With over two decades in the industry, Bjørn's work spans from publishing the Norwegian Circularity Report to authoring a practical guide on circular economy, demonstrating his pivotal role in steering sustainable industry practices.

Climate change is outdated: People want circular economy.

By Bjørn Arild Thon, CEO at RENAS.

Words matter. To achieve your desired outcome and inspire change, you must motivate your audience through language that engages rather than alienates them. Sounds easy, but we often forget to apply this basic rule of effective communication. The pursuit of environmental sustainability is a perfect example of where we are getting it wrong.

The Language Factor, a 2023 nationwide US study, supports this theory. The objective of this research was to understand how the US public views environmental sustainability issues, focusing on what language unites and what language divides.

"Climate change" is a phrase previously shown to be triggering. It polarizes people, resonating with many but also leading many others to tune out and not care. Effectively, you undermine your message and goal by using divisive language — despite most people being concerned about the environment and willing to take action to create positive change.

Are you misinformed?

Today's environmental debate is highly polarized. Not just because of the words used to describe current challenges, but also because we portray such challenge as black or white, do or die. On one hand, you have hardcore activists like Greta Thunberg and Just Stop Oil. They get widespread media coverage by screaming, being aggressive, and spreading fear. On the other hand, you have those proclaiming new technologies and fixes that will help us put in place solutions to global problems, but on longer timeframes. However, here too, they tend to simplify the challenges and solutions to an extent that loses the nuances and downplays the difficulties.

As professional communicators, it's easy to understand why this happens. By focusing on extremes or highlighting simplified solutions, it's easier to grab people's attention because they understand what's being said.

You will have faced this in your own communications work many times: How do you present a complex issue to the world so that people get it and act? The simplistic versus the complex media coverage of environmental issues can, in many ways, be compared to how we understand each other. Issues are similar to people, in that there is usually more to us (them) than initially meets the eye. Perhaps because the full extent of who we are and what's going on is too complex to tell others, or simply because we choose to keep parts of ourselves private. The same applies to issues: What do you share? And how do you share it?

One can argue that the two examples — issues and people — are completely different, and of course they are. Nevertheless, how we frame a story — whether about environmental issues or ourselves — has an impact, and words do matter.

Drop the bomb

I have dedicated my professional life to working towards a more circular economy. That has given me first-hand experience in disseminating important information to various stakeholders. It also means that, at times, I have failed to deliver a clear message, like when approving an article published about fairy lights with the headline "A Bomb Under the Christmas Tree", implying that the failure to properly recycle the lights, decorations and electronic devices associated with Christmas is a potential environmental hazard, or "bomb".

The incident happened years ago, and — luckily — we have evolved since then. Even though RENAS, the company I still work for, has the same goal of repurposing and recycling electrical and electronic waste, we try to be more mindful of how we spread the message.

My biggest inspiration on how to do this productively by using language that unites people is Frank Luntz, the US political pollster. He's the man who came up with the term "climate change" that replaced the use of "global warming." Luntz made me and several others aware that using the wrong language can undermine years of effort to raise awareness of sustainability issues. While the phrase "climate change" was a simple way to describe the problem, it polarized people and hindered rather than helped environmental progress. Luntz himself now realizes that the phrase he created divides rather than unites, and, like us, is working to develop language that will move the conversation forward.

The solution

One of the key takeaways from The Language Factor research we conducted is that Americans want balance in the coverage of environmental issues. Studies in other countries on the same topic report similar findings, showing that these sentiments are quite universal. People also respond better to more tangible messaging that is relatable to their everyday lives, as opposed to more abstract terms.

A 2022 European study concludes that the key messages about climate change, and the scientific consensus on the issue, are mistrusted by a large proportion of the population. A third of people in the UK and Norway think there are more important things to do in life than think about climate change. However, the study shows there is support for many of the actions to address climate change, such as recycling, or switching from car use to walking, cycling, or public transport. The key is to make it relatable and doable. The communication has to be relatable to people's everyday lives.

The research in The Language Factor also shows that the phrase "Climate Change" divides, whereas the words "Reduce, Reuse, and Repurpose" unite, and "Circular Economy" is even more uniting. People also respond best to empowering language and messages that make them believe their actions make a difference. Words that shame do not have the same positive effect. People want to act to protect and preserve the environment; they just need support from government, business, and society to do it.

Ultimately, we have a job to do. We need to adjust our communication to fit people's needs and wishes for balance regarding environmental issues. Extremism in either direction will fail.

Those who lobby to set agendas work hard to push their "truth". Therefore, I doubt everyone will contribute. Nevertheless, I hope you will join me and others on the mission to counteract extreme voices, deliver balance, and create necessary impact.

> "Nevertheless, how we frame a story — whether about environmental issues or ourselves — has an impact, and words do matter."

Olga
Rudnieva

CEO, Superhumans Center

Olga Rudnieva, CEO of Superhumans Center - clinic for psychological support, prosthetics, reconstructive surgery, and rehabilitation for people injured during the war. The center was built in 4.5 months during the full scale invasion and provided 700 prosthesis to those in need during its first year of operation. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, Olga led the largest humanitarian hub in Europe, HelpUkraine Center, initiated by Andrey Stavnitser, Ukrainian businessman. From 2004 to August 2022, she was a director of the Olena Pinchuk Foundation and coordinator of the space for sexual education Dialog Hub. Co-founder of Veteran Hub, a space for providing comprehensive services to veterans. Among the most notable projects was Medsanbat, thanks to which in 2014-2015 more than 5,000 paramedics were trained for the frontlines and first aid standards were introduced on the battlefield. Olga is a columnist and well known women rights activist.

"Is this the picture we want to see—a country of war victims? Or will we be building a country of superhumans?"

Ukraine, becoming a country of superhumans

By Olga Rudnieva, CEO, **Superhumans Center**

More than two years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing conflict continues to change our society, the ways we look and act, and what our cities look like. More and more people have experienced the trauma of war. And not only veterans: Internally displaced people within Ukraine, and abroad; those who are still close to the front lines, rejecting the idea of abandoning their houses. War has touched every person in Ukraine, whether we realize it or not.

We will be a country of people with disabilities, meaning that we have to start preparing for that time without waiting for the victory.

Our grandparents, who survived the Second World War, raised us with the paradigm that the worst comes after the war. People with wounds to their bodies, scarring, disfigured faces, or missing limbs: Is this the picture we want to see—a country of war victims? Or will we be building a country of superhumans? A country where, instead of lost limbs, we have advanced prosthetists; instead of wounds - scars; instead of trauma, stories of fighting for our independence. Being surrounded by people overcoming war trauma gives us hope for another trajectory.

This is how the idea of Superhumans appeared in the mind of Andrey Stavnitser, one of its co-founders.

To the original idea of providing people with prosthetics, we added a range of services: psychological support, rehabilitation, reconstructive surgery and reintegration into civilian life. That last one is key for any medical efforts.

We are helping our patients to return to civil life, as many of those who have combat experience cannot return to their previous positions for various reasons: disability, the consequences of concussions, or lack of motivation for routine tasks.

We need to start from basics: Ensure that people can access their workplaces and freely move around the cities.

People feel impairments less acutely when they don't face barriers. You are only impaired if your surroundings prevent you from climbing the steps to work, restrict your access to the lavatory, or make your workplace uncomfortable.

Accessible spaces are those that we can enter and use without external help. And here we talk not only about people with disabilities: women with children, and the elderly population also need accessibility. If we are lucky enough to live long enough, we will all need barrier-free spaces. At the end of the war, we expect around 3 million veterans, meaning that all of them will need rehabilitation at different stages due to malnutrition, months spent in cold trenches, or carrying heavy loads of ammunition. That means we will need to fully rebuild our healthcare system, our workplaces and our cities.

War trauma is not only a "privilege" of combatants. Civilians—even those who moved abroad and never heard air sirens—are also among the risk group.

We used to think that morale trauma is caused by doing things that are against your values, but often it's caused by not being able to do what you have to, or by witnessing unfairness and not acting properly.

The trauma of loss is known in almost every Ukrainian family. Even those, who didn't lose loved ones or material possessions have to admit that they lost their previous lives.

We all carry war traumas, but not all of us went through therapy or are aware of our triggers.

Although we can more or less prepare ourselves for communication with those people who carry visible traumas, it's much harder to be prepared for communication with those whose traumas are not evident at first sight. We never know the story of a person in front of us, or what he or she has been through.

At Superhumans Center, each of our employee has an essential understanding of how to react to flashbacks and aggressive behavior. We believe this should be a rule in every company from now on. We have to work on empathy, not from scripts.

We all have to start thinking of rewriting our social agreement.

Here are some basic rules:

- Don't overreact to people with disabilities. It's okay to have a short talk, but more personal questions are only appropriate when you have a sufficiently close relationship or the person initiates such discussion.

- Don't tell people with disabilities to "get well" or "be strong". Disability is chronic; it's not something that can be fixed overnight.

- Don't impose your help if it's not requested. You can ask, but you may only act when permission is given.

- Avoid bright colors and rapid video content in workplaces. Unexpected sounds can be a trigger and cause unexpected reactions.

- Be ready to relieve or assist employees who experience symptoms of trauma in the workplace; propose a glass of water or a deep breath.

And last but not the least: Thousands of veterans are already available for the market. We should look at their potential as sharp executors, crisis managers and great team players.

Having veterans in teams is about adding new skills and perspectives to the team.

But we have to be prepared—not only to overcome physical barriers, but to work through psychological barriers as well.

Teams should be prepared. Your company must have a clear mission and senses. This is the work of leaders and HR departments. You have to know the answer to what you do in the context of war and how you do it as a company.

Veterans don't want special attention; they want dignity and respect. And it's our work to ensure they get it in full.

Dan **Drury**

Non-executive Director, Bowen Craggs

Dan has been advising blue chips on digital corporate communications for nearly 20 years. From 2005 to 2023, he was Chief Commercial Officer at Bowen Craggs where he expanded the company's client base to include more than 50 Fortune Global 500 corporations and added quantitative research services to Bowen Craggs' portfolio.

Misinformation, disinformation, and your secret weapon in the AI age

By **Dan Drury**, Non-executive Director, **Bowen Craggs**

The digital era has created many new challenges for corporations worldwide, fundamentally altering the dynamics of public perception and trust. As misinformation and disinformation proliferate at an unprecedented pace, now accelerated by artificial intelligence (AI), the integrity of corporate reputations is under constant threat.

Reputation Risk Ahead

This year more voters than ever in history will head to the polls - nearly half of the world's population will get the chance to vote in national elections. I expect that we will see many examples of misinformation and disinformation being used to influence opinion. The tricks and traps we witness will undoubtedly become AI-powered as politicians, the media, campaigners, activists and bad actors learn to harness the most successful methods to manipulate voters. In particular the 'floating voters' that typically decide the result.

In 2008 Barack Obama became the first presidential candidate of a major party to utilize social networking sites to expand and engage his audience of supporters and donors. Obama's adoption of social media for political campaigning has since been compared to Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy's adoption of the radio and television media, respectively. In 2021 The European Union said 'online platforms threaten our societies and democracies', including through 'algorithm-fuelled propagation of hate speech and disinformation.' A 2023 study of Trump's impeachment found that Twitter 'bots' are 66 times more active than normal human users, producing nearly one third of all impeachment-related content, hugely growing Trump's share of voice. Now there is a danger that TikTok style dopamine-seeking algorithms combined with AI's

power to personalize and impersonate will release legions of smart bots to flood channels eager for more 'content'. I predict that corporations will be the target of these powerful new techniques once the political frenzy fades, giving communications teams about a year to prepare for a new wave of reputational warfare.

Understanding Misinformation and Disinformation

At the heart of this issue lies the distinction between misinformation—false information spread without malicious intent—and disinformation, which is deliberately designed to deceive. The rapid dissemination capabilities of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and X amplify the reach of such misinformation, often before the truth can take hold. Disinformation, with its insidious nature, further compounds the issue, leveraging the same platforms to undermine trust and distort public perception deliberately.

Social Media has become a Quagmire

Social media, for its part, acts as a double-edged sword, facilitating the spread of information while also serving as a fertile ground for the unchecked proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. The dynamics of sharing and virality on these platforms exacerbate the challenges of identifying and counteracting false information. Negative campaigns, competitor sabotage, self-inflicted viral PR disasters and even employees
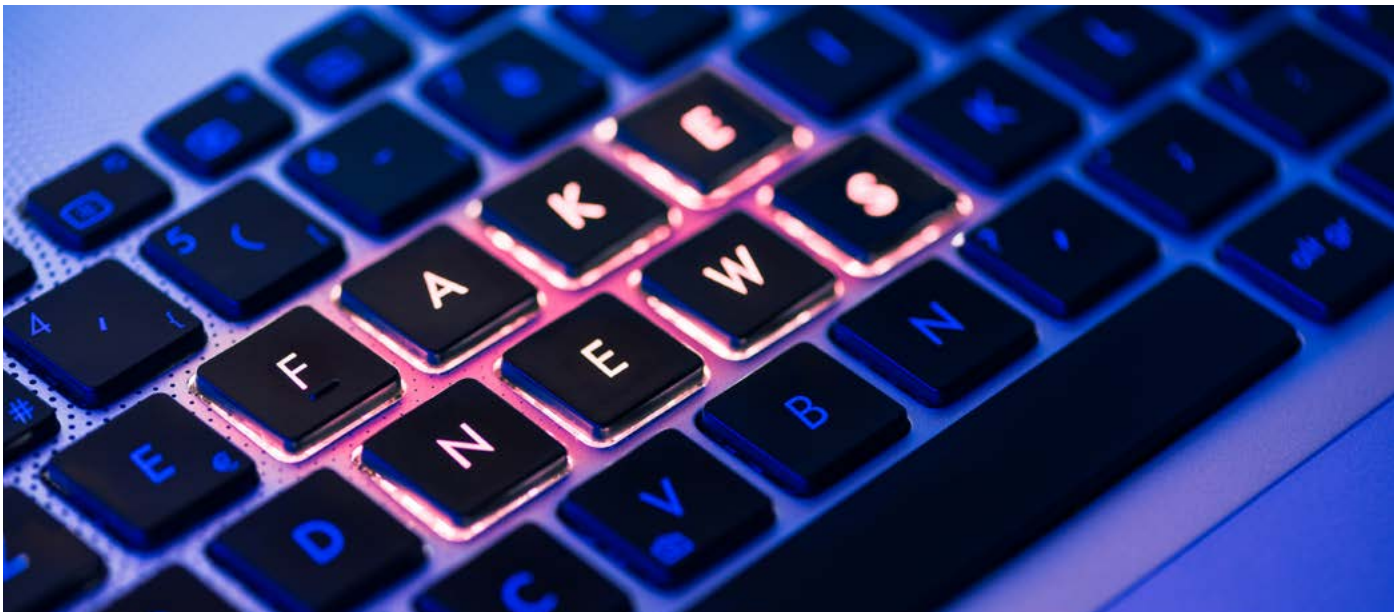
can inadvertently or intentionally harm your business's image on social media. All of these can result in losing control of the conversation and the risk of mishandled crisis communications further raises the stakes. Even good news is easily lost in the speed of the feed - your messages are one amongst many in an increasingly fast-flowing flood of news.

Furthermore, social media habits are changing. As the major players adjust their algorithms to copycat TikTok's success (less posts shared by your connections, more posts that you are more likely to enjoy). At the same time users, fearing the backlash from censorship, trolling and legal threats take their conversations into closed communities - sub-groups on messaging platforms, private communities and, increasingly, email lists. This increases the polarity of audiences making it harder for corporations to monitor and join the conversation.

This complex landscape demands a nuanced understanding of the forces at play and a strategic response to safeguard and enhance corporate image in 2024 and beyond.

The AI Complication

The role of AI cannot be overstated. Firstly, AI technologies have democratized content creation, enabling the production of sophisticated fake news, images, and videos with chilling realism. This evolution has blurred the lines between truth and fiction, making the source of information a critical determinant of its credibility. As The Economist pointedly noted on January 18, 2024, 'the technological battle between content generation and detection is increasingly leaning in favor of the forger, making the digital verification of content a Herculean task.'

Secondly, the search landscape will change. AI is already complementing traditional search results and, in time,

may end up replacing search behavior for a significant chunk of visitors. You will need to learn how to appear in AI searches and be found in Large Language Models (LLMs) for the topics you want to own and the image you want to project.

Thirdly, you will need to carefully manage your company's trade secrets, confidential information and internal conversation to ensure they do not end up as sources of data for the AI's voracious appetite. Most companies have quickly issued AI guidelines and many are trying out 'walled garden AI' for employees to use safely.

The Economic Stakes and the Power of Trust

The implications of misinformation and disinformation extend beyond mere reputational damage; they have tangible economic repercussions. Trust, or the lack thereof, can significantly influence investment decisions, employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, regulatory compliance, and risk management. In this vein, Ipsos' research, «Building reputation in 2023: the link between corporate reputation and business efficiency» reveals a compelling narrative about trust's pivotal role. Globally, a substantial majority of people are inclined to give companies the benefit of the doubt, a disposition closely tied to their overall trust in the company. Specifically, 51% of those who trust a company «a great deal» are willing to give it the benefit of the doubt in a crisis, compared to a mere 10% among those who feel neutral.

This finding underscores the critical importance of building and maintaining trust as a defensive bulwark against the tide of misinformation and disinformation. Bowen Craggs' own research (from visitor surveys running on our client's websites) further illuminates this point, showing that the corporate website can significantly influence public perception, for better or worse.

Visitors neutral towards a company (like the floating voters in politics) are three times more likely to change their perception for the better (27%) vs worse (9%) after visiting the company's website, emphasizing its role as the 'owned media' touchpoint for fact-checking and shaping public opinion.

The table below shows the correlation between 'pre-visit feeling' (how visitors feel about the company on arrival at the website) vs. 'brand perception change' (how their feelings have been influenced by the end of their visit). It highlights the ability of a good corporate website to reinforce, convert and turnaround your visitor's perceptions.

PRE-VISIT FEELING	BRAND PERCEPTION (AFTER VISIT)		
	Worse	Not changed	Better
Favourable	1%	32%	65% «Reinforcement»
Neutral / no opinion	9%	64%	27% «Conversion»
Unfavourable	49%	39%	12% «Turnaround»

Aggregate data from the Bowen Craggs benchmark survey showing percentages of 306,795 respondents who had their views changed by a website visit. ©**Bowen Craggs** 2024

Strategic Response and the Path Forward

In response to these challenges, corporations must adopt a multifaceted strategy that encompasses vigilant monitoring, proactive communication, and the strategic use of technology to authenticate content. The corporate website emerges as a critical platform for disseminating accurate information, serving as a beacon of truth in a sea of misinformation.

The findings from Ipsos and Bowen Craggs highlight the indispensable value of trust and perception in the corporate equation. Building and sustaining trust not only shields companies from the adverse effects of misinformation but also enhances their ability to weather crises and maintain positive stakeholder perceptions.

Your Secret Weapon

As we venture deeper into 2024, the corporate struggle against misinformation and disinformation will increasingly hinge on your ability to build and maintain trust. In a landscape where AI and social media have transformed the mechanics of information dissemination, corporations need a secret weapon to protect reputations but also position themselves for sustained economic success in an era where trust is both a precious commodity and a critical strategic asset. The good news - you already have this secret weapon - it's your corporate website, but is it ready to use?

If you want to read more articles like this sign up for the **Bowen Craggs newsletter.**

> "The corporate website emerges as a critical platform for disseminating accurate information, serving as a beacon of truth in a sea of misinformation."

Roger **Bolton**

Roger Bolton, President of Page

Roger Bolton is the president of Page, the premier global professional association for senior corporate communication executives. He is also a trustee and a past chairman of Page. Previously, Bolton served as senior vice president of communication at Aetna, where he also chaired Aetna's Council for Organizational Effectiveness, with responsibility to lead corporate culture change in a strategic business transformation. Before Aetna, Bolton led IBM's global media relations and directed communication for the IBM server and software groups. Prior to his business career, Bolton was assistant secretary of the Treasury for public affairs under President George H.W. Bush; assistant U.S. trade representative for public affairs under President Reagan; and special assistant to President Reagan in the White House, with responsibility for the president's relations with business and labor. He also was a press secretary and chief of staff in the U.S. Congress and chief political reporter for the Marion (Ohio) Star.

The Page approach to multistakeholder value creation

By **Roger Bolton**, President of **Page**

In the Page research report, **The CCO as Pacesetter**, issued in 2019, we argued that with increasing stakeholder demands, businesses had an opportunity and a responsibility to take action to create societal value in three ways:

Corporate Purpose

This is the answer to the questions, why do we exist and what value do we create? It focuses on how a company's core offerings can create value not just for customers and shareholders, but also for all stakeholders and society at large. Employees are motivated to work for companies that take seriously their ability to create value that helps people live better lives and make society better.

Societal Impact

Many stakeholders increasingly demand that businesses take steps to mitigate the negative impacts of their operations, policies, and programs on all stakeholders, including on human rights and environmental issues. There is also an opportunity to enhance the positive impacts on training and employment, for example.

Social Advocacy

Demands from employees and other stakeholders to advocate for social policy change have led to many companies speaking out and taking action to advocate for constructive change.

Today, calls for businesses to take action in these areas are even louder than in 2019, due to the increasingly obvious effects of climate change, the geopolitical challenges of war and big power rivalries, the need to ensure opportunity for people of every race and background and the impact of technology on social polarization and loneliness.

As we interviewed Page members around the world for our upcoming Page research report, we found that companies have indeed responded to these stakeholder demands with increasing focus in each of these three areas. We also found that the heads of corporate affairs and chief communication officers (CCOs) are more at the center of the strategic deliberations in the C-Suite than ever before.

Sustainability was a hot topic everywhere, including in China, where we heard a compelling report on the role of the CCO in leading on ESG policy and reporting. In Australia, one CCO discussed an impending decision to fundamentally restructure the approach to their business model in response to ESG considerations, with significant implications for society and employment. Across Europe, the commitment to these issues is quite advanced, with evolving regulatory landscapes, such as the EU's Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD), emphasizing not just financial returns, but also the broader impacts on all stakeholders.

Some critics from the left argue that much of what businesses say they are committed to amounts to just empty words accompanied by little actual progress, and the **U.N. itself has called** for a crackdown on greenwashing. When COP28 was held in Dubai last year, **there was criticism** of the involvement of oil countries and companies.

At the same time, some on the political right, especially in the U.S., are pushing back against what they see as a "woke" political agenda driven by progressives, which distracts businesses from their fundamental responsibility to deliver value to their shareholders.

At Page, we believe the best response to those critics on the left and the right is not to back down from doing the right thing for the business and society, but rather to prove them wrong by delivering long-term value to shareholders AND to society. This, of course, requires an organization-wide commitment to deliver on our promises.

It can also be helpful to change the way we talk about issues, avoiding acronyms like ESG and DE&I, which are easily demonized by critics to audiences that don't clearly understand what they mean. **Recent research by maslansky+partners** shows that responsible businesses using plain language to describe their actions earn support even from anti-ESG zealots.

The recent Page CCO guide on **Stakeholder Capitalism** makes the case for a prominent role for the CCO in working to ensure that the organization puts in place solid policies and strategies to deliver on its commitments. It also notes that "transparency and authenticity are essential to building stakeholder trust," and argues for businesses to hold themselves accountable on their efforts to meet their commitments." Measurement and reporting represent an opportunity every enterprise should seize," the guide said.

At the end of the day, what counts is results, not pledges or statements, and we, as communication leaders, have a responsibility to help our organizations align our actions with our intentions. The second **Page Principle** is "Prove it with action."

Of course, that is easier said than done. The CCO Guide offers some clear advice, and Page has been a collaborator and a supporter of the Yale School of Management's (YSOM) program on Stakeholder Innovation & Management (Y-SIM), which uses design thinking to create more positive outcomes than the tyranny of trade-offs typically associated with managing conflicting interests. Seeing problems through the lens of each stakeholder's distinct interests allows for the creation of solutions that maximize value for each. This flips the stakeholder-centric approach from one defined by compromises to one defined by innovation.

Our inaugural joint **Page-YSOM executive education program** offering a Yale certificate was a huge success, and we will be offering another opportunity soon.

As businesses navigate the complexities of the multistakeholder environment, CCOs are leveraging their unique position to guide their organizations through this transformative journey. CCOs can ensure their companies not only thrive but also contribute positively to society by offering a nuanced understanding of stakeholder expectations, a commitment to integrating these considerations into the core business strategy, and the ability to communicate this commitment effectively.

The transition towards multistakeholder value creation represents a significant shift in how businesses operate and engage with their ecosystems. For CCOs, it presents an opportunity to redefine the value of communication as a strategic asset—driving sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous futures for their companies and society at large.

Vanya Babanin

International Strategic Communications Leader

Vanya Babanin has over 25 years' experience as a global strategic communications lead with a focus on reputation management, change communication, and corporate culture navigation. Her expertise ranges from listed corporations to agile organisations, covering various industries and all communication disciplines. With deep expertise in teaching brand management and extensive consulting experience, she blends academic insight with industry knowledge.

Navigating complexity: the communicator's path to connection and understanding

By **Vanya Babanin**, International Strategic Communications Leader

A crisp winter evening in a quaint European eatery. I find myself back for a fleeting moment after several months in a new work environment. Gathered with old colleagues and friends, the atmosphere is both cosy and charged with unspoken tension. We share recent experiences, attempting to wear the smiles of days gone by. It's as if our laughter echoes the clown's forced cheerfulness, concealing emotions beneath. One question lingers in our thoughts: What unfolded? What shifted? Was it the pandemic, the wave of digitisation, or simply the natural course of growing up?

We explore business challenges and prominent risks, mirroring the discourse of Davos discussions: Disinformation. For us, communication experts, this term holds no novelty. Nor does the threat. Yet, we thoroughly investigate the potential implications for the social environment.

Various factors have propelled us into a world of constant connectivity and information overload. Technology advancements and on-demand personalised access to content have profoundly shaped our expectations for rapidly consuming information, such that we no longer even attempt to «chew» it – just swallow. The pressure to deliver high quality and provide solutions across geographies, brands, social polarities, languages, and cultures doesn't seem lighter against the backdrop of the accelerating business pace. Amidst this eclectic mix of diverse tastes, colours, sounds, and even smells, we strive to uncover what remains to unite us.

Traditional families and conventional relationships are unravelling to make room for a more vibrant diversity, each of us having our own unique frame of reference. But how do we step onto this new island without clutching onto our muddy past? And how do we set our direction, when the traditional social consensus on value exchange no longer holds? For years, the Edelman Trust Barometer has highlighted a trend of increasing trust in companies – at the expense of media, politicians, and institutions.

So, imperceptibly, we find ourselves in a world where companies occupy central roles in every aspect. Not yet to the point where everyone tosses their personal data into a virtual wallet and decides to become a citizen of the digital society. But definitely a world where companies are taking on a range of public services previously handled solely by state and local governments. Who's preparing employees and trainees for today's changing demands? Who's jumping in, long before slow healthcare systems, with the first COVID-19 vaccines? Who's looking out for the balance and mental resilience of their people? And when you want solid info, who's more reliable than companies – after all, it's not that hard to discover who they are and what they stand for.

Business is increasingly assigned (and must therefore fulfill, in a self-fulfilling prophecy) ever broader social functions, often displacing traditional public service providers. And what's at the core of it all? Values and culture. Corporate culture – this intricate puzzle, weaving together subcultures from different regions, business units, departments, teams, and tribes, that ties all to the common purpose. Sure, every business is out to ensure – foremost – its own survival, followed closely by the higher purpose behind it. But consider this: If businesses didn't exist, they couldn't lend that helping hand. In the corporate realm, clarity prevails – everything is straightforward and transparent, with no need for embellishment or dressing up.

Optimistic gazes meet those marked by past hardships, each individual hopeful for a future in which all of us that sit at the table will be peaceful, inclusive, and safe. My gaze drifts down to the yellow woollen sweater, then lingers on the shiny silver bracelet resembling a serpent coiled to bite its own tail. As the physical world fades out of focus, my mind delves deeper into the intricacies of the communication profession.

Quietly and unnoticed, we find ourselves immersed in a subtly transformed reality. What are the basic skills we need as communicators to be successful at our jobs? And by job, I don't mean just making it clear to our customers and employees what we propose and how we deliver it. Our role has long transcended those boundaries, now encompassing a holistic circle of strategic aligning and shaping perceptions.

- We can identify and interpret (upcoming) changes in each of the individual micro- (or macro-) worlds of our stakeholders;
- Understand what drives them, and define their pain points or challenges;
- Clearly and comprehensibly articulate how we can empower them to overcome these challenges, pinning down each possible brand touchpoint;
- We master the creation of a compelling corporate image and seamlessly integrate it into a unified perception matrix. A matrix tailored for each unique user case, internally and externally, on- and off-line, in any possible language (don't think only of verbal ones!);
- Convey values and guide anticipations to guarantee elevated satisfaction;
- We constantly juggle with specific metrics to craft a relatively unbiased evaluation of the subjective stakeholders' internal perceptions towards our organisation;
- And we achieve all of this within shifting social and business landscapes – from navigating the polarised and intense sensitivities in social processes, to the internal scope delineation of co-projects with other functional areas such as HR, IT, or Sales.

To cope with these challenges, we need to hone the most crucial future-oriented skills – the only skills that matter and keep us moving forward and (out-)performing.

These are: Critical thinking, information analysis and interpretation, depending on the context, decision making, and problem solving. We develop new ways and means of working – digital dexterity is not a buzzword, it's a practical necessity for utilising tools like the translation-ordering platform, the AI-powered predictive writing plug-in, the guided search of a digital asset management (DAM) system, and even the business trip report in SAP. The complexity of the business proposition and the stakeholder environment have required us to master project management; to both work and lead on strategies and what (once upon a time) used to be a simple content piece. We create and put in place processes and workflows daily, just to ensure all perspectives are considered; and push ourselves beyond our own limits, to speed up the delivery.

When it comes to transcending geographical and disciplinary boundaries, no other professional area has as much challenge and success to report as us, the communication pros. Because we can build bridges like no-one else, and bring all stakeholders to the same table. And if these are brilliant, narrow experts in almost every single area of business, then we – the communications people – are virtuosos in creating all-encompassing, versatile, transformative solutions.

So, as the night deepens and the world around us fades into shadows, let us carry forth the light of understanding and compassion. For in our shared journey as communicators, we find solace in the knowledge that our efforts, however humble, have the power to illuminate even the darkest corners of the human experience.

> "Because we can build bridges like no-one else, and bring all stakeholders to the same table.„

Bisera **Savoska**

Founder and CEO, Savion Ray

Bisera is a tech-driven CEO and creative strategist who founded Savion Ray over 10 years ago. Based in Brussels, she works with internationally renowned brands and organisations, helping them develop effective digital communications, producing high-quality video campaigns and impactful social experiments. Prior to Savion Ray, she worked as a Head of Communications for a woman empowerment organisation and headed digital teams for Brussels based consultancies.

Community and AI: creating digital spaces where everyone belongs

By <u>Bisera Savoska</u>, Founder and CEO, <u>Savion Ray</u>

In the digital age, communities transcend physical boundaries, establishing themselves as vibrant hubs of shared interest, support, and action online. As we delve into the significance of these digital communities, it's clear that their role in fostering connection, collaboration, and shared identity is more critical than ever. Through the lens of Savion Ray's case studies and the latest insightful explorations, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of how crafting community narratives and leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) can profoundly enhance the sense of belonging within these digital spaces.

The Importance of Digital Communities Today

Digital communities represent more than just points of convergence for similar interests; they are dynamic ecosystems where innovation, culture, and collective voice flourish. We have highlighted the transformative potential of <u>community narratives in building change together,</u> emphasizing how these shared stories pave the way toward a more inclusive and empowered future. This perspective underscores the pivotal role digital communities play in today's interconnected world, where they serve as essential platforms for dialogue, learning, and influence beyond geographical limitations.

Crafting Community Narratives

At the heart of every thriving digital community is a compelling narrative. These stories knit together individual experiences into a collective identity, guiding the community's values and vision. Our insights into community narratives showcase the **power of storytelling** in digital spaces, where crafting and sharing these narratives foster a deep sense of connection and collective identity. By creating inclusive online spaces such as forums, social media campaigns, and interactive experiences, we empower communities to tell their stories and effect change. Through **strategic storytelling** and **collaborative (sometimes even gamified) efforts,** communities are not only reshaping their narratives but also influencing policy, sparking social movements, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect.

Leveraging AI to Enhance Community Engagement

AI's integration into digital communities brings about a revolution in personalizing experiences and streamlining communications. AI-driven tools, such as chatbots, various language models, image generators, and moderation systems, have become indispensable for organizations of all levels, sizes, and sectors. This technology not only supports operational efficiency but also enhances the user experience, making digital spaces more inclusive and engaging.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Digital Space

Still, at the core of leveraging AI in digital communities is the aim of fostering a real sense of belonging among members. By providing personalized experiences and ensuring a safe, engaging environment, AI can help cultivate spaces where every member can find their place and feel part of something larger than themselves. The challenge remains — how to transfer our real-life expertise and known practices to online (and even AI-moderated) environments?

While Savion Ray succeeded in creating **space for women in comms** and public affairs in Brussels, we always strive for more. Our already well-established community showcases the importance of inclusive narratives and communities where diverse voices are not only heard but celebrated. Thus, advancing technologically should not prevent us from remaining anchored in our values. That is why we are actively gathering insights to embrace the changes AI brings. As a result, we are in the process of developing a workshop and later an AI comms toolkit, which will help you address the crucial nexus between technology and communications in the EU.

> "Digital communities represent more than just points of convergence for similar interests; they are dynamic ecosystems where innovation, culture, and collective voice flourish."

Embracing Change and Innovation

With AI, we have the tools to personalize experiences deeply and maintain engaging narratives for every community member. It is no longer simply about automation; it's about understanding and adapting to your audience's needs, ensuring every interaction feels personal and meaningful. As digital communities evolve, leveraging AI will be key to fostering spaces where members feel a genuine sense of belonging. Our shared narratives, enriched by AI, will continue to be the foundation of vibrant, inclusive communities where everyone is valued and connected.

As communicators, our path ahead is as challenging as it is exciting. This journey is not one we or you should undertake alone. It's a collaborative endeavor that invites each of us to contribute, learn, and grow. Together, we have the power to shape a future where communication transcends barriers, fostering a world that is more connected, understanding, and inclusive. Stay tuned for more to come, as our work and curiosity in the face of new challenges never stops.

Sophie
Drummond

Client Services Director, TheTruthWorks

Sophie is Client Services Director for TheTruthWorks, an Employer Brand and Employee Engagement Consultancy, focused on connecting company culture to business value by leveraging truth.

Rest in peace, internal comms

By **Sophie Drummond**, Client Services Director, **TheTruthWorks**

Join me in fondly remembering the days of internal communication (IC). Those halcyon days when people actually noticed your posters, your monthly newsletter didn't need eight rounds of sign-off and as long as the canteen menu was up-to-date, your intranet was thriving.

The good old days… Gone, but not forgotten.

Well, write that eulogy, dear editors, because IC (as we knew it) is dead.

Why? Because nothing is truly internal, you can't control the size or shape of your audience and you absolutely can't control what happens to the information you're sending out. Thinking that the work you're doing in Internal Comms will remain an internal comm is a mistake.

There's been a societal shift since our industry first found its feet. Now, everyone has a voice and a platform through which to amplify it. Influence

is no longer something you earn through tenure or leadership; It's something that can be gained overnight. Something our industry has worked on for years is now being achieved by individuals armed with a smartphone and a point of view.

Fueled by content creators, bloggers, vloggers and empowered by online activism and citizen journalism, individuals are asserting their voices, sharing opinions and expressing themselves without limitation. They're creating communications (and communities) that people have the time, headspace and attention span to consume; on the channels that they naturally use. And what's more, those channels and therefore these voices are always on, placing control in the hands of the receiver not the sender.

So, why do we celebrate the demise of traditional IC at TheTruthWorks? Because these online activists, these empowered people with passionate points

of view – these are our employees. These are the people who have the power to hustle for us. To advocate for our employee experiences. To further our purpose. To call out our mistakes.

What an opportunity this is, for brands that truly believe in making employee experiences that are true, that are real and that matter.

What a risk this is, for brands who have double standards; Who believe performative content is enough; Who lack an aligned mission, vision and values that guide their everyday decision making; Who don't hold their leaders to account.

Glassdoor brought us the concept of glass walls: A direct and transparent view into an organisation from the people who know it best. Today, the thought of those views being confined to one or two channels is a luxury. You can find raw, truthful content on every social channel that you use, including those your kids use. From live-streaming redundancy calls, publishing corporate announcements and sharing trade secrets to publicly calling out toxic work environments – there are examples everywhere.

This sounds scary. And it is. But with great fear comes great change.

We need to continue to leverage the power of colleagues as content creators. We need to step away from formal advocacy programmes towards creating comms strategies that are snackable, shareable and authentic to our purpose. We need to start seeing managers as influencers, with a platform and a following. We need to see ERGs as activist groups that hold credible power and authority.

We can't stop the tide. We can't control the tide. We just have to join it.

Brands today must embrace that their reflection is made up of many voices and many diverse points of view. They must bring together external and internal communications in order to create unified, transparent and interconnected communication ecosystems whilst retaining creativity, freedom and diversity of opinion.

The line between internal and external comms is blurred at best. Now's the time to accept that this is actually a good thing for us all. IC may be dead, but we're not grieving. Its impact is more alive than ever.

> "Influence is no longer something you earn through tenure or leadership; It's something that can be gained overnight."

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNICATION DIRECTORS

The European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) wants to attract, inspire and engage current and future communication leaders to drive excellence in our profession.
We offer communication professionals a platform to connect, deepen their expertise, share best practice, establish and promote relevant standards.
LEARN MORE

Get in touch
If you want to learn more about the EACD or
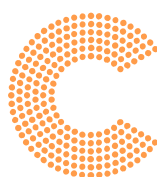simply want to say hello, please reach out to us.

European Association of Communication Directors
Avenue des Arts 47, 1000 Bruxelles
Tel:+32 232 025 30,
info@eacd-online.eu

With thanks to our exclusive global media monitoring and analysis partner

CARMA