

## THE EDITOR

Dear readers of *Communication Directory*,

The second European Communication Summit is almost upon us, the last-minute preparations are under way, and we are excited at the prospect of hosting a wide and distinguished array of speakers (see 'Events'). The summit represents a unique opportunity for our industry to take a moment to communicate with itself for a change; to compare notes, to re-evaluate, to share knowledge and to encourage. In other words, it is a process of professionalisation, and one which we look forward to sharing with you in Brussels next week. Until then, please enjoy this newsletter and look out for *Communication Director* magazine, due out in May.



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## COMMENTARY

### *Third time is a charm?*

Italy has re-elected Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister; in many ways his victory is not a terribly surprising feat for a man who owns the vast majority of the Italian media, including over 90 percent of TV stations. Although Mr. Berlusconi's lacklustre political track record has amounted to nearly nothing of note, nevertheless this will be the third time the multi-billionaire has been elected to high-level office. As election results were tallied, the popular Italian comic-activist Beppe Grillo, who had attempted to persuade citizens to boycott the election, bluntly stated: "In no democratic country can the one who owns the media be a politician. Imagine Obama controlling CNN, ABC and FOX. Or Zapatero dictating articles to the editors of El Mundo and El Pais, as they are his employees." Voter turnout was at an impressive 80 percent despite a looming apathy and lack of confidence in voters that this election would be able to bring about



much-needed change and improvements for the economy. In a government infamous for being in a constant state of flux and upheaval, whether or not Mr. Berlusconi can deliver on his election promises of fewer taxes and more prosperous times to come may just spell out the lifespan of his upcoming term in office.

By Paul J. Thomas

## TOWARDS A MULTIVOCAL APPROACH

*Communication Directors who care for the reputation of their companies will, in time, have to pay more attention to the many corporate and non-corporate voices which meet and compete during a crisis.*

by Finn Frandsen & Winni Johansen



On September 9 2007, an aircraft type Dash 8-Q400 belonging to Scandinavian Airlines and flying from Copenhagen International Airport, Kastrup to Aalborg Airport in Denmark, was involved in an accident.

Imagine: when approaching the regional airport, the right main landing gear cannot be locked safely and the pilots are forced to prepare for an emergency landing. During landing, the main landing gear collapses, and the aircraft is damaged substantially. The passengers are evacuated as quickly as possible by the emergency team. Some of the passengers sustain minor injuries.

The aircraft accident immediately creates serious attention in the Danish media. After the emergency landing, one of Scandinavian Airlines' spokespersons declares this to be an "isolated event" and that the airline was fully confident in its fleet of Dash 8-Q400 aircrafts, produced and delivered by Bombardier in Canada. The media accuse the airline of neglecting the problems that they have had with this type of aircraft on previous occasions. Only a few days later, on September 12, another Dash 8-Q400 aircraft makes a forced landing in Vilnius, and then again, on October 27 yet another accident takes place in Kastrup due to problems regarding the landing gear. The event seems no longer to be that "isolated". On October 28, Scandinavian Airlines decide to discontinue the use of Dash 8-Q400 aircraft immediately. The reputation of the airline – and the SAS brand – is at risk.

Many companies are familiar with this unfortunate situation. Feeling safe in the knowledge that all is well, the crisis gathers speed. A lot of corporate and non-corporate stakeholders start voicing their opinions, and a lot of voices mix in the communications: from the media, from clients and employees, from investors, politicians and business partners. Crisis communication is not only a question of how companies can defend their corporate reputation using an appropriate crisis response strategy, but the companies' ability to diagnose and decipher the complexity and dynamics of the crisis also becomes very important.

**APPROACHES TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION** Although the study of crisis communication remains a fairly new discipline within the field of corporate communication, at least two important research traditions have emerged. Common to both is their interest in the close relationship between crisis communication and the corporate reputation of an organisation. However, they differ when it comes to their focal point. The first tradition is inspired by rhetoric, impression management and sociological theories of accounts. Its focus is the question of what the spokesperson of an organisation says or writes when the organisation finds itself in the middle of a crisis situation. The second tradition is, on the other hand, inspired by public relations theory, organisation studies, reputation management and social psychology. It focuses on the question of when and how and with whom the spokesperson must communicate during a crisis situation.

**IMAGE RESTORATION STRATEGIES** Within the first tradition, hereafter named the rhetorical or text-oriented tradition, the focus has been on verbal defense strategies used by organisations when they are defending their corporate image or reputation during a crisis situation. One of the most important representatives of this approach is American communication researcher William Benoit, the author of *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies* (1995). According to Benoit's theory, crisis communication is first of all a strategy of image restoration. A company accused of organisational wrongdoing will typically use the following main strategies in order to defend itself:

1. *denial,*
2. *evasion of responsibility,*
3. *reducing offensiveness of event,*
4. *corrective action,*
5. *mortification.*

Most of these main strategies can be divided into sub-strategies or tactics. The first statement produced by Scandinavian Airlines – naming the accident an “isolated event” – was clearly an attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the event (a minimisation strategy).

Another important representative of the rhetorical or text-oriented approach is Keith Michael Hearit, the author of *Crisis Management by Apology* (2006). According to Hearit's theory, the main purpose of organisational crisis communication is to gain terminological control, that is: to choose the right words when communicating about the crisis in order to define what reality is, not only for the organisation and its employees, but also for the external stakeholders. Thus, an organisational crisis is not an objective reality, but a social construction to which the organisation contributes with its crisis communication.

**SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION** Within the second research tradition – the strategic or context-oriented tradition – the researchers are more interested in the impact that the situ-

ational context may have on the form and function of the crisis response strategies in question.

One of the most important representatives of this approach is American public relations researcher W. Timothy Coombs, author of *Ongoing Crisis Communication* (1999) and *Code Red in the Boardroom* (2006). Coombs has introduced his theory under various names during the last 10 to 12 years: what started out as the “symbolic approach” is now a theory of crisis communication as relationship management or Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory focuses on the use of crisis response strategies to protect the organisation's reputation, arguing that the effectiveness of these strategies will depend on the characteristics of the situational context. The reputational threat presented by a crisis doesn't remain the same from crisis to crisis. It depends on variables like the crisis type, the crisis history of the organisation concerned and the crisis responsibility attributed by the stakeholders to the organisation. With “victim crises” (like natural disasters, rumours or product tampering) where the attribution of responsibility is low, the organisation can choose a defensive strategy. But with “preventable crises” (like organisational misdeeds or mismanagement) where the attribution of responsibility is high, the organisation must choose a more accommodative strategy.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Crisis Communications: A brief history**

- ▶ The study of crisis communication began in the early 1990s, ten years after the publication of the first book on modern crisis management.
- ▶ The rhetorical or text-oriented tradition focuses on what to say, & how, when the image or reputation of the organisation is under attack
- ▶ The strategic or context-oriented tradition focuses on when & where to communicate, & to whom, in a crisis situation.
- ▶ The new multivocal approach takes into consideration the many corporate & non-corporate “voices” (stakeholders) which meet & compete during a crisis.

**WELCOME TO THE RHETORICAL ARENA** There is no doubt that the two research traditions briefly presented above represent an important contribution to the study of crisis communication. Nevertheless, both theories can be criticised for focusing mainly on crisis response strategies from a purely reactive perspective, not integrating crisis communication with crisis management, and not paying enough attention to the high degree of complexity and dynamics that characterise most organisational crises.

Crisis communication is not a matter of just one sender (the organisation in crisis) communicating to just one receiver (the stakeholders perceived as a homogeneous group). When a crisis occurs, a vast number of actors enter what we have chosen to name

**“In our approach, the key word is ‘strategic interdependency’ inspired by game theory and complexity theory.”**

the rhetorical arena. Our approach to crisis communication is a multivocal approach. Not only do we find several voices representing the organisation in crisis. We also find a multitude of other voices claiming a stake in the crisis in question: former employees, angry consumers, citizens, the local community, the media in search of a “good story”, formal and informal political constituents, crisis experts or consultants evaluating the crisis management of the organisation concerned. All these various voices will meet and compete inside the rhetorical arena, and they will interpret and use the “crisis messages” in different ways depending on their stake(s). This means that the organisation in crisis has to manage a far more complex and dynamic situation than predicted by previous research traditions. In our approach, the key word is “strategic interdependency” inspired by game theory and complexity theory. The organisation and its spokespersons have to take into account what other organisations or individuals are communicating when it comes to making and taking choices or decisions. For example: what, how, when and where will other actors communicate, when Scandinavian Airlines states that it will “permanently remove its entire fleet of 27 Dash 8-Q400 from service”? This complexity

makes it much more difficult for the crisis manager to navigate.

In the case of the crisis of Dash 8-Q400, more actors enter the rhetorical arena as the crisis develops: beginning with the initial accident on September 9, where Scandinavian Airlines and Bombardier are supporting one another, expanding to the second accident only three days later and to the third accident on October 27, when more and more critical voices are heard. By then, Scandinavian Airlines and Bombardier are no longer in agreement of how to lay out the facts. And within Scandinavian Airlines alone several voices airing different positions are heard: from the spokesmen of the top management in Denmark as well as in Sweden to current and former employees. Then add the injured clients, potential customers, various authorities and investigation boards, Bombardier, media in Denmark and Sweden, etc.

**A COMPLEX GAME** Crisis communication is not just about responding to accusations of organisational wrongdoing. It is also a matter of being able to diagnose and anticipate the complexity and the dynamics of the crisis and to act strategically in relation to the other actors playing the crisis game inside the rhetorical arena. Some actors may be identified as fellow players, others as opponents, and some (like third parties) might only enter the arena to exploit the crisis following a completely different agenda which has nothing to do with the crisis at all. Protecting the symbolic capital of the company – its corporate image or reputation – becomes a very complex and dynamic kind of game and a new challenge to both the communication director and the crisis management team of the organisation concerned. |

## STORYTELLER



This article was published in Communication Director's current issue “Weather the storm! The crucial methods of crisis communication”. Winni Johansen PhD is Associate Professor at Aarhus School of Business and Director of Study of the Executive Masters in Corporate Communication. Finn Frandsen is Professor at Aarhus School of Business and Director of the ASB Centre of Communications. Together, they have co-authored *Krisekommunikation* (2007)

## Recent Appointments from the World of Communications / April 2008



Steen Reeslev  
(Head of Group Relations and Communications)  
Institution: A.P. Moller - Maersk Group  
Start: April 15



### **Denmark: A.P. Moller - Maersk with new communications Head**

It has been announced that, effective April 14th, STEEN REESLEV is the new Head of Group Relations and Communications at A.P. Moller - Maersk Group, the worldwide organisation involved in energy, shipbuilding, retail and manufacturing industries with about 110,000 employees and offices in around 130 countries. A former journalist, Reeslev has been senior executive vice president and head of group communications at Danske Bank since 1998 and a member of the bank's executive committee.



Jenny Grey  
(Director of Communications)  
Institution: Cabinet Office  
Start: July



### **UK: Jenny Grey to take over communications at Cabinet Office**

JENNY GREY will take up the position of Director of Communications at the Cabinet Office, UK, beginning in July. She replaces John Worne, who left to become director of strategy and external relations at the British Council. Grey was appointed to the Audit Commission in 2006 as managing director of communications and public reporting. Previous positions include director of strategy and comms at the National Patient Safety Agency. She will report in her new position to permanent secretary for government communications, Howell James.



Alexandra Rocca  
(Director of Communications)  
Institution: Crédit Agricole  
Start: April



### **FRANCE: Crédit Agricole hires Alexandra Rocca to head comms**

Effective April, ALEXANDRA ROCCA is the new Director of Communications at Crédit Agricole, the largest retail banking group in France. Rocca comes from a similar position at Crédit retail arm LLC. She joined in 2005 from Galeries Lafayette department stores where she was deputy head of group communications. Prior to that she held roles at department store Printemps and medical gas firm Air Liquide

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## Recent Appointments from the World of Communications / April 2008



Hans Klaus  
(Director of Communications)  
Institution: FIFA  
Start: May 20



### Switzerland: Hans Klaus scores at FIFA

HANS KLAUS will assume the role of Director of Communications at FIFA, world football's governing body, on the 20th of May this year. He is currently the director of global corporate communications at Japan Tobacco. He also has worked for the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police, as well as Swissair. Klaus replaces acting director Andreas Herren, who leaves to accept a new position elsewhere



Erik Ljungberg  
(Senior Vice President and Head  
of Corporate Relations)  
Institution: Scania  
Start: Autumn 2008



### Sweden: Scania hires Erik Ljungberg to head Corporate Relations

ERIK LJUNGBERG has been appointed Senior Vice President and Head of Corporate Relations at Scania, the heavy transport manufacturers. He is currently Head of Corporate Marketing at CLAAS Group in Germany, and will report in his new role to Leif Östling, President and CEO of Scania. He also becomes a member of group management. Ljungberg will succeed Cecilia Edström, who will take up a similar position outside the group



Valerie Bernis  
(Head of Group and Financial  
Communications)  
Institution: GDF Suez  
Start: March



### France: New Head of Group Communications for GDF Suez

VALÉRIE BERNIS now heads the newly-formed Group Communications and Financial Communications Department at GDF SUEZ. Bernis joined Suez in 1995 and was latterly Executive Vice president in Communications and Sustainable Development. She had previously acted as press secretary for Édouard Balladur, the former French Prime Minister, when he was at the Finance Ministry 1986-88 and during his Presidential campaign 1991-93. GDF SUEZ was formed in a merger last year which was Europe's largest energy deal.



Goffredo Freddo  
(Public Affairs and Corporate  
Communications Director)  
Institution: Merck Sharp and Dohme  
Start: February



### Italy: New appointment at Merck Sharp and Dohme Italy

Since mid-February, Merck Sharp & Dohme Italy has had a new Public Affairs and Corporate Communication Director, GOFFREDO FREDDO. He will report directly to CEO and President Dr. Jose Luis Roman. Freddo joined the global research-driven pharmaceutical products company thirteen years ago and for the last three years he has been their Economic and Industrial Policy Associate Director.



Stefan Hackh  
(Head of Corporate  
Communications)  
Institution: Ringier  
Start: July 1



### Switzerland: New communications role for Hackh at Ringier

Swiss publisher Ringier has announced that, from July the 1st, STEFAN HACKH will become their new Head of Corporate Communications. Hackh, a graduate in Law from the University of Bern, was previously Communications Manager at AG Media. In his new role he succeeds Christoph Soltmannowski, and will report directly to Marco Castellaneta, Ringier's Head of Group Communications.

## IMPRINT

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Personnel News updates to

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## EVENTS



### 24 April 2008 **European Communication Summit**

The second European Communication Summit will again bring together top-class communication professionals from all over Europe and from many different fields and sectors. The Summit covers all topics relevant to Communication professionals and spokespersons in business, associations, NGOs and politics. This year, speakers include Marianne Amssoms, Vice President Global External Communications, InBev; Markus Beeko, Director of Campaigns & Communications, Amnesty International; David Bickerton, Director of Communications, BP; Reed Brody, Spokesperson & Counsel, Human Rights Watch; Barbara Crowther, Head of Communications, The Fairtrade Foundation.

Hotel Le Plaza,  
Brussels

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### 16 April 2008 **Social Impact of Globalization**



This year, the European Commission in Brussels in cooperation with CEPS will be hosting a major conference on the social impact of globalisation.

European Commission,  
Brussels

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### 16 - 18 April 2008 **One World Film Festival**



One World is the largest human rights film festival in the world. On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, Brussels will host this year's program highlights.

Permanent Representation of  
the Czech Republic,  
Brussels

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### 21 - 23 April 2008 **Language and International Business Conference**



For everyone interested in language training for business, Languages & Business 2008 offers a forum for the exchange of experiences, and the chance to get up-to-date with the matter.

Institute of Directors

Lindner Congress Hotel,  
Dusseldorf

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### 24 - 26 April 2008 **The EU in International Affairs Conference 2008**

The Conference will provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas among the growing number of scholars that take an interest in understanding the interface of EU and international politics and law.

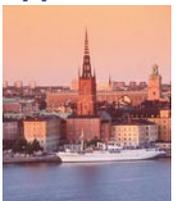
It is organised in the framework, and with the support of 'Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: the Role of the EU' (GARNET, Network of Excellence, 6th EU Framework Programme for Research, 2005-2010).

This year's Conference is the first in what is hoped to be a series of conferences, with the second planned for 2010.

Egmont Palace,  
Brussels

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### 24 - 29 April 2008 **Communication and Mobile Applications Forum**



The event is organised by Europe Unlimited together with Innovationsbron under the i-techpartner initiative as a partnering platform for the next generation of communication and mobile applications technologies as it promotes emerging SMEs and research leaders in Europe.

Clarion Hotel,  
Stockholm

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### 06 May 2008 **European Patent Forum**



The event will be co-organised by the European Patent Office, the government of Slovenia, the Slovenian Intellectual Property Office and the European Commission. Slovenia will hold the EU Council Presidency in the

first half of 2008.

European Patent Office,  
Munich

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### 16 - 17 May 2008 **EU - Latin America & the Caribbean Summit**



The Lima Summit will focus on the fight against poverty, inequality and exclusion, as well as sustainable development, climate change, environment and energy.

Lima,  
Peru

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**Conference fee: 1,840 Euro\***

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\*\*\* All fields are mandatory