

“SUFFER A SEA CHANGE, INTO SOMETHING RICH AND STRANGE”

Powerful stories, well told, possess their own communications alchemy, and can help transform perceptions of your brand

by Rachel Davis and Alan Newland



Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provides us with a memorable and thought-provoking quote about risk. But the play also invites us to reflect on the values, morality and redemption of its shipwrecked survivors. Watching the play recently, I did what we all do when we see a good drama or read good literature – I began to reflect on my own near shipwrecks (I am a sailor), my values and even my mortality. In short, the play was a vehicle for making meaning of my life. It was not long before I extended this to my professional life too. How I try to achieve goals, avoid disasters, manage and motivate, take risks to transform, improve and change. Communications is a fascinating process of how we structure thinking and language to create messages that achieve change – in attitudes, behaviour and perception. We know that the language of persuasion – in

speech writing as much as in Shakespearian literature – relies on crafting not only words, but also structure. There are two distinctive “modes of thought” (as the American psychologist Jerome Bruner put it) to provide us with ways to structure experience and interpret reality. On the one hand, we use argument and evidence to convince us of the truth of that experience. On the other, we use narratives and stories to convince ourselves of its authenticity and verisimilitude – its ‘lifelikeness’. How we come to know the ‘truth’ of our experience is not just an important question for philosophers and psychologists, but an important one for communication and public relations professionals. Bruner explains that one mode attempts to fulfil the formal-logical system of describing and explaining the world. It tries to assure us of verifiable paradigms, tests and reference

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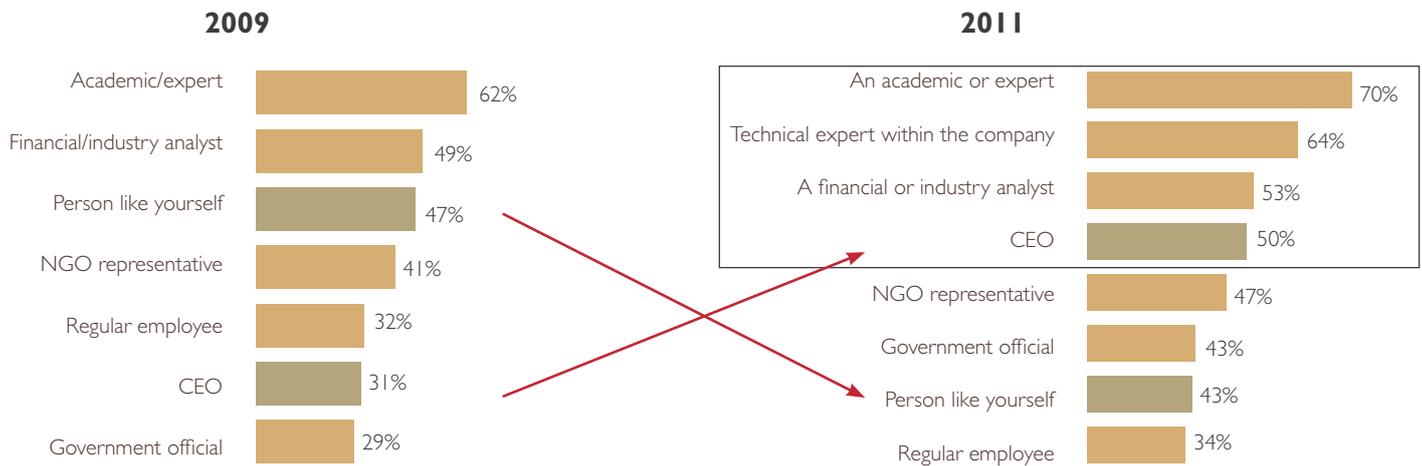
FACTS & FIGURES

2010 will be remembered for some dramatic corporate crises, such as the BP oil spill, Toyota's product recall, bank bail outs and other calamities in the financial sector. The shifting fortune of corporate trust is therefore a timely subject of research, and for the past decade or so, Edelman have conducted their own investigation into the state of trust in businesses, government, NGOs, and media around the world. Edelman recently published their eleventh annual Trust survey. 5,075 people in 23 countries on five continents were asked a range of questions to do with trust and business, from comparing NGOs to businesses, companies in developing countries and the ranking of various industries to corporate reputation. To mark their achievement, Edelman have provided a handy timeline at the beginning of their report charting the development of corporate trust through the course of their annual reports (see link), and the report offers

several opportunities to compare and contrast stakeholder's shifting concepts of trust across the years. One of the more striking developments is the finding that "CEOs lead rise in trust in authority, but 'person like me' drops amid flight to credentialed spokespeople" (below). From a lowly position of second from bottom just two years ago, CEOs – that much-maligned group – are now in the top tier of trustworthy spokespeople. 50 per cent of the survey's respondents say CEOs are credible spokespeople for a company, a 19-point increase over 2009. In contrast, a "person like yourself" has dropped from the top three to the bottom two, although the report is quick to suggest that this represents more of a change in definition of a "person like me" than distrust of peer-to-peer communication. *Taken from Edelman Trust Barometer: 2011 Annual Global Opinion Leaders Survey*

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If you heard information about a company from one of these people, how credible would it be?



COMMENTARY

Reactions to Bin Laden's death

International reactions to the death of Osama Bin Laden were immediately pounced on as state-of-the-nation barometers: it is fitting that the symbolic killing of an ambiguous figurehead should give rise to so much hot air. In Germany, an attention-seeking judge has filed a two-page complaint against Chancellor Angela Merkel for violating paragraph 140 of the German penal code that condemns the "rewarding and sanctioning" of a criminal act: Ms Merkel let slip that she was "pleased" that Bin Laden had been killed, which provoked a slew of editorials and opinion polls on Germany's relationship with arms and combat, with the United States and (as always) with its own past. In the United States, there was much nervous debate about scenes of jubilant street-parties – nervousness about the possibility of retaliatory attacks combined with a heightened sensitivity of how the world would perceive them at this crucial moment. Having to second-guess oneself is a sign of the times – in this social media age, it is impossible to experience a moment without immediately taking into consideration how posterity will record and judge the way in which you



experience that moment. But it is the US government's handling of the public relations aspect of this dramatic episode that will be studied by future historians. In complete contrast to the manic Twitter overload immediately following the first hints that something was happening in the arid sky above an Abbottabad compound, the White House has decided to release only a handful of ambiguous pictures of the bloody scene inside, and none of Bin Laden himself. This modest approach is in keeping with President Obama's measured speech announcing the kill, his eloquent delivery carefully parsed to withstand the inevitable speculation about the implications for his own future as President.

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PERSONNEL



Job van Harmelen

(Director, Corporate Communications)

Institution: TNT

Start: May 01



The Netherlands: Communications shakeup at TNT

Postal delivery group TNT has a new communications structure to accompany its demerger, officially slated for May 25. As of May 1, JOB VAN HARMELEN has moved from the group's head of internal communications to become director of corporate communication at TNT Express. ROBIN BOON has taken on the same role at the Mail division.

MEDIA - SATURN



Sven Jacobsen

(VP, Corporate Communications)

Institution: Media-Saturn Group

Start: May 01



Germany: New corporate role at Media-Saturn for Jacobsen

SVEN JACOBSEN, previously head of corporate communications and company spokesman of the Media-Saturn Group, takes on the newly created position of vice president, corporate communications. He reports to Horst Norberg, CEO of Media-Saturn Holding GmbH, and is responsible for strategic development of communications at the electronics retailing chains Media Markt and Saturn, as well as internationally of all 17 subsidiaries of the group. in close



Lynsay Taffe

(Director, Communications, Marketing & Public Affairs)

Institution: ASA Start: May 01



UK: Taffe promoted to replace Erkal-Paler at ASA

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has promoted LYNsay TAFfe to the role of director of communications, marketing and public affairs. She succeeds Esra Erkal-Paler (as reported last month), and now oversees all communications, marketing and public affairs. Taffe joined the ASA in 2004 as policy and public affairs adviser and was subsequently promoted to communications and policy manager in charge of media and stakeholder relations.

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EVENTS



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16 – 19.05.2011

9th Annual International Conference on Communication & Mass Media

The Athens Institute for Education and Research brings together students and scholars of media and communication. Past conferences drew participants from five continents and more than 50 countries,

► ATINER, St George Lycabettus Hotel, Athens

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19 – 20.05.2011

2nd Annual Pan-European Social Media Summit & Workshops 2011

The importance of developing a social media strategy is perhaps the most radical change of the past 20 years faced by marketing and corporate communications professionals. This event will explore issues around this reality.

► IBB International, Amsterdam

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24.05.2011

The Big Idea: What are the BIG ideas in PR and Communications Right Now?

Frank Klaas, global head of communications at Jaguar Land Rover, is one of the speakers at this event; subjects up for debate include social media, measurement and evaluation, effective budgeting and others.

► PRWeek, London

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08 – 10.06.2011

3rd European Summit on Measurement

AMEC, the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, and the Institute for Public Relations organise their third annual Summit. Best practices from business and insights from research on an international level will be presented at the event.

► AMEC, Lisbon

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