

THE EDITOR

Dear readers of *Communication Directory*,

The past month has seen several new developments, not least the sudden revival of the controversy surrounding the Muhammad cartoons that led to a boycott of Danish products two years ago (see *Commentary*). Our latest issue of *Communication Director*, fresh from the press, features a prescient interview with Astrid Gade Nielson of Arla Foods, which was hit hard by the original protests. Her comments illuminate the theme of the issue: *Crisis Communication*. In this newsletter, along with the usual round-up of recent appointments and upcoming events, we feature another article by David Zaruk, which expounds upon improving public perception.



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COMMENTARY

Playing with fire?

Just in time to coincide with the 19th Worldwide Security conference held in Brussels this month (see *Events*), the question of freedom of speech and intercultural communication has flared up again with the reprinting of the Danish cartoon of the prophet Muhammed that caused a wave of protest and violence – and deaths – in 2006. The decision to reprint the image was made by several Danish papers following the arrest on Wednesday of three men accused of plotting to murder the cartoon's 73-year old illustrator, and was picked up by several papers outside Denmark, including Spain and Holland, in their commentary on the case. According to the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper, which had issued a public apology in 2006, the reprint is meant to show commitment to freedom of speech. To take such a brave – if provocative – step where so many nervously tip-toe is commendable, but balanced with freedom of speech must be sensitivity to the cultural



and religious sensibilities of the new Europe and the world beyond. Time will tell whether the reprint provokes a comparable backlash to two years ago, but strongly-held beliefs on both sides will call for a deft handling of communication, a skill never more vital than under such circumstances.

by Dafydd Phillips

COMMUNICATIONS ALCHEMY

If Communication Directors in the chemical industry think they can rebuild public trust simply by communicating more and stressing scientific facts, they are ignoring some important factors.

by David Zaruk

Since the late 90s, the chemical industry has been maintaining effective crisis communication systems. These systems are dependent on good relations with production site neighbourhoods and with developing greater trust from the general public. For the latter, industry actors have been applying 'risk communication theories' to address poor levels of public trust in chemicals (and the subsequent regulatory pressures policymakers are compelled to impose). A public more aware of the benefits of chemicals, more informed of the science, should trust industry and be partners in progress and innovation. Should crisis situations arise then, this trusting public would not turn against industry. But, as seen in the 2005 Eurobarometer report on risk issues, the public concern over chemicals and the chemical industry remains higher than other risks. Indeed, in recent EU regulations, regulators continue to identify chemicals as needing further regulation. WWF director Karl Wagner went so far in 2004 as to liken the chemical industry to Big Tobacco. The chemical industry has been perceived as being responsible for a range of health problems, from rising infertility rates to the widespread obesity epidemic, and for a catalogue of environmental disasters.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION: THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

The negative public perception of chemicals comes from the concern about risks and the inability to identify the chemical industry as the source of benefits. The problem is in part structural. There is a disconnect between the upstream chemical research and production, and the downstream user and retailer perception of the

chemicals in their products. Perfume and cosmetics would not sell well if they were to be labelled as chemicals, nor would electronics or fabrics. The public see the benefits at the downstream level – they do not follow the innovation to the source and usually associate the chemical with the risk. There is scant communication from the downstream user crediting the chemical industry. For example, we thank Nokia for the better design, durability and performance of their new mobile phone models, but Nokia does not in turn inform the consumer that these innovations in plastics, screen colours or battery life were only made possible by achievements in the chemical industry. To the contrary, Nokia reassures its public that no 'toxic' chemicals are used in their products. And while praise is not passed up the supply chain, blame is. When a chemical is released into the environment, the outrage is focused on the chemical producer more than the user responsible for the release.

A PERCEPTION SHIFT We are undergoing a perception paradigm shift in our prevailing cultural narrative on the value of science. Since Francis Bacon, science had been supported as the main tool to defend humanity from a brutal nature and its trail of disease, hunger and debilitation. As science succeeded in addressing society's needs (modern agriculture, life expectancy, medicines, energy), the benefits of science began to be taken for granted (we began to perceive nature as less of a threat). As industry combined with research to develop a wide range of consumer products (things we want rather than need), the role of science (and technology) began to be questioned. Nature began to be perceived as a victim of the progress of modern science – our rivers, our forests, our food, our bodies – eve-

rything in nature was carrying the burden of modern chemistry. The perception of nature shifted from one of ravaging plagues and pests to that of the lonely polar bear adrift on an ice shelf.

PRECAUTIONARY BY NATURE The perception of chemicals is that they are man-made (and thus subject to more precautionary attention than natural chemicals). Natural is perceived as favourable over man-made chemicals. This public perception is ironic since man is indeed made of chemicals, and there are some very nasty natural chemicals that our man-made chemicals have been developed to protect us from (through disinfectants, medicines, material shelters...). I often present Bruce Ames' work about the similar level of carcinogenicity in a single cup of coffee compared to the level of toxins found from the pesticide residue in an average year's fruit and vegetable consumption. I do not manage to reassure students on the safety of the food chain, but rather I tend to put them off of drinking coffee (until they miss the benefits!) While we may accept that a cup of coffee is comprised of around 1000 chemical substances (and an average meal around 10,000), we are not disturbed by this information (they are mostly natural chemicals), nor do we demand testing or stringent risk assessments on natural chemicals. Nature is a chemist we seem to trust, man is not.

ELEMENTS OF TRUST We trust nature because we are familiar with it. Man has eaten cabbage for centuries, so its relatively high level of toxicity is not alarming, whereas well-tested GMOs do not gain our trust. Chemical names like HBCDD or Bisphenol-A do not enter into our everyday parlance and, as foreign terms, can create a sense of fear or discomfort. Trust also develops from a sense of kinship – that they are one of us (sharing a common language, culture and style). Synthetic chemicals will never be one of us. This would not be a problem were there some credible expert or body reassuring us of its safety. Today though, with the explosion of information on the internet, we have lost trust in many traditional sources (the expert, the doctor, the government regulator) and search for reassurance among Wiki-experts (a consensus-based synthesis of participatory information). Agency is an important

trust determinant. If I can participate in the decision process, then I will be more trusting of the outcome. The problem with chemicals is that they can enter my body, against my will, destroying any sense of trust. These elements of trust: familiarity, kinship, credibility and agency, are challenges for the chemical industry.

BETTER SAFE THAN RIGHT! One element that has not been included as a factor in our determination of trust is 'being right'. On the perception of chemicals and human health, being safe has priority over being right. We do not regret bringing an umbrella if it does not rain, nor do we get impatient at our mother if she is overly concerned about our well-being. Trust is based on 'good intentions' and precaution is as good as you can get. If precaution is taken and the decision is proven not to be right (if there is a false positive), it is still considered as appropriate and rational. In other words, 'not being right' for precautionary reasons, does not equal 'being wrong'. We trust more easily when there is a perception of caring; a motherly NGO saying they just want us to be safe is subject to another standard of reliability than scientists. As watchdog organisations, environmental NGOs may bark at the moon 99 times out of 100, and we are grateful for the one time they may bark at a mad cow. Scientists (especially from industry) in making an error one time out of 100 may find their reputation in tatters. Not being right does not undermine precautionary campaigns, but is considered part of a verification process (Karl Popper's principle of non-falsifiability).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How chemicals & communications must work together

- ➔ Public concern over chemicals & the chemical industry remains higher than other risks & the industry is blamed for health scares & problems.
- ➔ The problem is structural: 'downstream' users see the benefits of chemicals but do not praise 'upstream' entities like companies & distributors.
- ➔ Science originally aided our protection from the environment, now it is perceived to be using up the natural world.
- ➔ The public must be informed & learn to trust chemical companies.
- ➔ Companies & NGOs must be perceived to be precautionary & 'caring'.
- ➔ The supply chain will have to work together to stress the benefits of chemicals in their products.

BEING RIGHT – HAVING THE RIGHT The logic of precaution is not clearly understood by scientists and industry. The chemical industry has always operated with the view that with reliable scientific data concerning safety and environmental health levels, they would have the right to produce and use chemicals. Product stewardship has been the standard to ensure that with proper controls throughout the value chain, production of chemicals could be maintained sustainably and without public concern or regulatory pressure. The scientific data and the conclusions they generate have been based on the Paracelsus Principle (the dose is the poison). Public perception of chemicals is not based on the ‘dose is the poison’. The presence of any synthetic chemical raises concern, no matter how small. NGOs have begun to articulate an alternative to Paracelsus: “the timing is the poison”, which focuses on chemical health effects on newborns. Activists argue for the removal of all risks from any synthetic chemicals. The dose is the poison ran up against smart NGO Web campaigns that appealed to the emerging eco-religion and the simplistic belief that alternatives exist (or if they don’t, as the possible consequences of embracing uncertain innovations are just too great, precaution is the only solution). Greenpeace is running a campaign targeting electronics producers and retailers in order to remove a range of toxic chemicals from their product lines. Even cultural icons like Apple could not withstand the media onslaught. With the diverging world views, truth became relative to value systems. Being right with the science did not give chemical manufacturers the right to produce substances that might be hazardous (even at minimal levels of risk). If the NGOs are not scientifically right, it does not imply, from the level of public perception, that they are wrong. The perception is that they are caring. Even if regulators give producers the right to use a chemical, pressure from retailers and consumer groups to use alternatives dissolves this right.

WHAT WE NEED IS MORE COMMUNICATION, RIGHT?

The recent strategy of risk communicators and reputation managers has been to provide clear information on the scientific data, preferably via third-party academics, so that the public will be reassured and policies will follow in a more reliable manner. But

communication is different from merely providing information. It is treating – spinning – information to support a message. On risk issues, more communication will not necessarily restore or improve reputation. When the public is concerned about or afraid of a chemical that they may be exposed to, more communication could even be counter-productive. A parallel example: if I am concerned about the reliability of a second-hand car, a hard-hitting used-car salesman will not reassure me, but will likely further frighten me off. If I do not trust the chemical industry and they begin to communicate harder on the safety of their substances, I may treat their words as ‘spin’, further undermining trust.

BREAK THE SUPPLY-CHAIN SILENCE With NGO activists capitalising on developments in certain Web 2.0 applications, the rise of the ‘Wiki-expert’ and the loss of regulatory authority, something needs to be done to stop the erosion of confidence in chemicals. More communication just won’t do it. The supply chain will have to work together to stress the benefits of chemicals in their products (or at least acknowledge them). Greenpeace has set the standard for supply chain chemicals campaigns (and there are indications this model will spread from electronics to other sectors). This approach, and its regulatory pressure to opt for less-tested alternatives, is beginning to show strains on supply, material performance and price. This will affect consumer trust and confidence. Coordination throughout the supply chain (from chemical producer to retailer) is essential. If only they could learn to speak the same language.

STORYTELLER



This article was published in Communication Director's current issue "Weather the storm! The crucial methods of crisis communication". The author, David Zaruk, is Assistant Professor at Vesalius College, Brussels, lecturing on EU Lobbying, Corporate Communications and PR. He helped set up Greenfacts, which communicates scientific info on health/environment issues to non-specialists, and has served as expert advisor on risk policy comms to several EU bodies.

Recent Appointments from the World of Communications / January 2007



Catherine Roger
(Director of Communications)
Institution: FNAC
Start: January



France: *New Director of Communications at FNAC*

CATHERINE ROGER has been appointed as Director of Communications for FNAC, the French retailer of cultural and consumer electronic products. She will be responsible for all corporate and press relations as well as sustainable development, and will report to the Chairman's office. A graduate of EFAP (School for Press Officers), Roger's previous appointment was as Communications Director for Elle magazine and its spin-off brands.



J. Christopher Preuss
(Vice President, Communications
and Global Product Communica-
tions)
Institution: GM Europe
Start: February 1



Switzerland: *GM Europe with new Vice President of Communications*

As of February 1, J. CHRISTOPHER PREUSS has been appointed Vice President of Communications at General Motors Europe AG, where he will be responsible for all communication activities for GM and its brands across Europe, including Chevrolet, Saab and Opel/Vauxhall. He also retains his role as head of Global Product Communications. He succeeds Julie Hamp, who has moved to Pepsi Co. to become their communications leader.



Michael Schade
(Head of
Communications)
Institution: Bayer
Start: May 1



Germany: *Michael Schade to take over communications for Bayer*

Bayer, the chemical and pharmaceutical company, has appointed MICHAEL SCHADE as its new Head of Communications. Effective May 1, he will head the Group's global communication activities. His predecessor, Heiner Springer, was Head of Communications for the past 22 years. Schade first joined Bayer AG as Head of Publications in 1980. Replacing him will be Michael Preuss, currently Head of Media and PR at Robert Bosch GmbH in Stuttgart.

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Recent Appointments from the World of Communications / January 2007



Juan Fajardo
(Director of Marketing Commu-
nications)
Institution: Mercer
Start: January 2008



Spain: New Director of Marketing Communications at Mercer

The HR consultancy Mercer has appointed JUAN FAJARDO as Director of Marketing Communications for its Spanish operations, effective from January this year. He is also responsible for Customer Relationships Management (CRM). Fajardo joined the company in 2005, and earned his degree in Information Science at the Universidad Complutense and his postgraduate degree in Economics and Business with the Instituto de Empresa, both in Madrid.



Francisco Corberó Vinyals
(Director of Corporate Commu-
nications)
Institution: Schneider Electric
Start: February 2008



Spain/Portugal: Schneider Electric hires Corberó Vinyals

Effective from February, Schneider Electric, the electricity and automation management company, has appointed FRANCISCO CORBERO VINYALS as its Director of Corporate Communications for Spain and Portugal. Having qualified in Senior Management, Marketing and Public Relations at Spain's College of Business and Public Relations, Vinyals began his career in 1990 as Media Coordinator at the ABECE Cabinet.



Tobias Wagner
(Head of Group Commu-
nications)
Institution: Swedbank
Start: January 7



Sweden: New Head of Group Communications for Swedbank

Swedbank, the Nordic-Baltic banking group, has appointed TOBIAS WAGNER as its new Head of Group Communications, effective from January 7. He will be responsible for all communications across the Swedbank group, which also operates in Western Russia and the Ukraine, and reports directly to CFO Mikael Inglander. Before working for Swedbank, Wagner was Senior Consultant at the PR agency JKL.



Mark Webster
(Director of Communications)
Institution: CAF
Start: February 4



UK: Mark Webster to take over communications for CAF

The Charities Aid Foundation has appointed MARK WEBSTER as its new Director of Communications. From February 4, he is responsible for communications strategy, media relations, research, policy and events. Webster reports to CEO John Low, who joined CAF in August. Webster, a former journalist for ITN and correspondent for the Financial Times, was most recently a senior spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats.



Gavin Partington
(Head of Communications)
Institution: WSTA
Start: February 4



UK: Gavin Partington new Head of Communications at WSTA

From February 4 the Wine and Spirit Trade Association has a new Head of Communications, GAVIN PARTINGTON. He is now the organisation's chief media spokesman, as well as being responsible for the whole of its communications strategy. Until recently, Partington was a director with Parys Communications where he led its media training business. He has also been a political editor for GMTV.

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EVENTS



22 Feb 2008 **Joint Employment Report 2008**

The Commission will present the annual Joint Employment Report (JER). This report will give an update of the employment situation in the EU, trace the principal reforms undertaken and highlight the main challenges for the future. It also includes the latest indicators on the European labour market performance. The report will be sent to the EPSCO Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) for adoption on 29 February

European Commission
Brussels, Belgium

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19 Feb 2008 **Worldwide Security Conference**



In 2008, the 5th Worldwide Security Conference will focus on combating terrorism and violent extremism. It is one of the largest and most prestigious security conferences in the world.

East West Institute

Brussels, Belgium

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21 - 22 Feb 2008 **European Business Summit: Greening the Economy**



With the theme of 'Greening the Economy: New Energy for Business', the EBS 2008 will focus on how Europe can turn a "carbon challenge" into business opportunity, giving new energy to growth and jobs.

Federation of Enterprises
Brussels, Belgium

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26 Feb 2008 **Conference: The State of the Economy**



The IEA presents its 25th State of The Economy event, with speakers from the government, industry and academia discussing and debating the UK economy, as well as the outlook for the US, Europe and China.

Institute of Directors

London, UK
Brussels, Belgium

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04 - 09 March 2008 **CeBIT: IT and telecommunications technology trade show**

CeBIT is the world's largest annual trade fair showcasing digital IT and telecommunications solutions for home and work environments. The key target groups are users from industry, the wholesale/retail sector, skilled trades, banks, the services sector, government agencies, science and all users passionate about technology.

CeBIT offers an international platform for comparing notes on current industry trends, networking, and product presentations. Deutsche Messe AG has organized CeBIT in Hannover each spring since 1986.

Hannover, Germany

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04 March 2008 **High Level Meeting of the European Alliance for CSR**



The aim of these High Level Meetings between companies and the European Union is to review progress of the Alliance and to discuss challenges that businesses and the EU are facing on demographic change, competitiveness

and sustainable development.

CSR Europe
Brussels, Belgium

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10 - 12 March 2008 **World Health Care Congress Europe 2008**



At the World Health Care Congress Europe over 600 health leaders share best practices and successful initiatives for improved delivery and outcomes in Europe. Participants include health ministers, leading government officials,

hospital directors and IT innovators.

Berlin, Germany

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13 - 14 March 2008 **European Council Spring Summit**



The summit will focus on the latest stage of the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and will also prepare the Budget review. This will be the first chance to analyse the achievements of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue.

Council of the European Union
Brussels, Belgium

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