

## DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

*Communicating cross-culturally is a must in a globalised world, and communications professionals must convince their companies of the value of bringing people together to share a diversity of business thinking.*

by Dafydd Phillips and Richard Morgan

**E**uropean integration, globalisation, organisational change, corporate alliances and M&A, the focus on shareholder value, as well as increased competition and the challenge of market differentiation – these are all topics that are debated in conference calls and boardrooms again and again, and yet it is often overlooked that all of these issues are affected by people’s differences and the need to respond to them as individuals. Managing diversity is not just cosmetic – it increases market share and customer intimacy. It improves stock performance and public image. Diversity also helps a company become more competitive in the labour market. All of this means that any internal scepticism to a cross-cultural strategy must be met head on. The drive for managing diversity must come from top management, but also involve all levels of the company in an inclusive and interactive manner. The point must be made that it is a strategic necessity.

**FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE** As ever, communicators have a key role to play in conveying the importance of cross-cultural issues. The best training must be first-hand experience of working with others from around the world. Where this is not always feasible, however, a quick Google search reveals numerous specialist consultancies that offer business-focused cross-cultural classes. Certainly, the mixture of acquiring new skills while immersing oneself in specific cultures can be an asset and a stepping stone to global success.

**MINDING YOUR INTERNATIONAL** Ps and Qs A certain well-known multinational financial institution has run several campaigns convincing us that they are the world’s local bank. Their highly effective advertisements picked on the minutiae of cross-cultural interactions that have been the mainstay of comedy

routines and TV depictions of ‘funny foreigners’ for decades: the ‘hilarious’ misunderstandings that can arise when two cultures interpret a simple gesture in very different ways. These are the stumbling blocks that international communicators wake up in a sweat over, but are they really such a major feature of cross-cultural communication? We all want to be on our best behaviour, especially when we are guests abroad or are hosts to guest from abroad, but are we in danger of paralysing our communications efforts from fear of causing unintended offence? Lu Ellen Schafer is executive director of Global Savvy, and has provided multinationals with international training and consulting programmes. Her experiences have given her an overview of the way we work around the world. In her opinion, when it comes to.....

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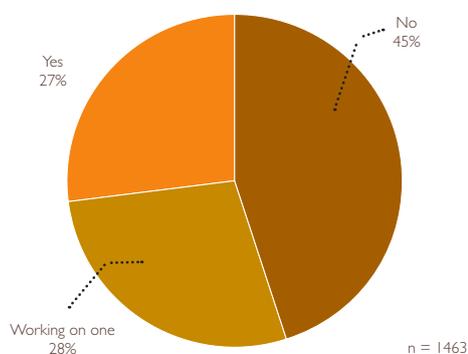


## FACTS & FIGURES

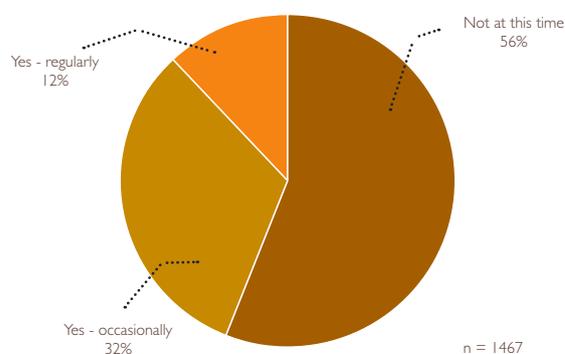
Employers faced with reduced communication budgets and resources are gradually turning to social media to keep their workforce engaged, according to a survey by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation in cooperation with Buck Consultants. The foundation surveyed nearly 1,500 people from a broad range of industries and localities. One of the more striking findings of the survey is how few reported that there was a policy of sorts embedded in the corporate structure that addressed employees' use of social media;

however, almost as many reported that their company was "working on one", so there is growing recognition of the value of social media as a form of employee engagement. Even more damning is the poor showing of top executives who participate in the use of social media, both internally and externally – a measly 12 per cent. At least the tools of social media have made their way into the workplace – it is clearly now time for the top tier to get the message and adopt these tools. *Taken from the IABC Research Foundation/Buck Consultants.*

### Policy in place to address employee use of social media



### Top execs participate in internal and external social media



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## COMMENTARY

### A crisis of credibility for General Motors

This is a critical time for General Motors's (GM) CEO Fritz Henderson (far right): it was announced on Friday that his head of European operations, Carl-Peter Forster (right), is to leave the company. This must come as scant comfort to the recently re-elected Angela Merkel, whose government had lobbied hard in favour of a proposed sale by GM of its Opel branch to Canadian company Magna, but was left empty-handed when GM suddenly reversed its decision. The proposed sale would have ensured no factory closures in Germany: now the situation is in turmoil. Economy Minister Rainer Brudler called GM's behaviour "totally unacceptable", unions organised walk-outs to protest the decision, and the government promptly demanded the return of 1.5bn Euro it had lent to the car manufacturer to smooth over the sale. GM's decision does have an inherent logic, however dismaying it must be to German taxpayers. The company's heart was never in the sale – it was particularly alarmed at the prospect of fatally-undermined global competitiveness – but was effectively forced into it ahead of bankruptcy proceedings in June, because US taxpayers were unwilling to bail out European operations. Europe, and especially pre-general election Germany, was eager to spend a lot



of money in order to keep Opel going. Now, GM's credibility is spread thin in Europe as well as the States (a point conceded by J. Christopher Preuss in the upcoming issue of Communication Director). So Mr Henderson's communications team have their work cut out for them in positioning the CEO as public face of the embattled company, a leader ready and able to lead his people out of the wilderness.

Photos: GM

#### Imprint

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Marc-Oliver Voigt

Newsletter Editors  
Richard Morgan,  
Dafydd Phillips

Publishers  
Rudolf Hetzel,  
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## Recent Appointments from the World of Communications / November 2009

# PERSONNEL

BDF ●●●●  
Beiersdorf



Thomas Schönen  
(Corporate VP Corporate  
Communications)  
Institution: Beiersdorf  
Start: January 2010



### Germany: Schönen to head communications at Beiersdorf

In January 2010, THOMAS SCHÖNEN, currently marketing manager brand communication Germany and managing director of NIVEA Haus, will become corporate vice president corporate communications at Beiersdorf AG, the cosmetics company headquartered in Hamburg that employs just under 22,000 people worldwide and that generated sales of 5.97 billion in 2008. He will report directly to executive board chairman Thomas-B. Quaas.

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation



Kate James  
(Chief Communications Officer)  
Institution: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Start: January 2010



### USA: Kate James Announced as Chief Communications Officer

KATE KJAMES, formerly senior vice president for global corporate communications at Citibank, has been announced as the new chief communications officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She will take up her new role in January 2010 and will be based at the foundation's headquarters in Seattle. She will act as the senior communications advisor to the foundation's co-chairs and executive team.



Dorine Bregman  
(Director of Communications)  
Institution: Le Cour des Comptes  
Start: October 26



### France: Bregman promoted to Communication Director

DORINE BREGMAN has been promoted to the role of communications director at La Cour des Comptes, the French Court of Auditors, effective October 26. She replaces Danielle Vachoux. Bregman is a graduate of the IEP Paris, part of the University Paris IV-Sorbonne, a doctor of political science and a visiting scholar with the Annenberg School for Communication (Los Angeles).

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# EVENTS



### 25.11.2009 – 26.11.2009 The Corporate Responsibility Reporting & Communications Summit

Over 30 speakers from companies including Danone, Tesco, SKF, ASDA, the GRI and Vodafone offer their insight on improving CR reporting strategy in 14 practical workshops. Sessions will focus on improving readability, driving internal change, achieving transparency and materiality.

► Ethical Corporation,  
Regent's Park Marriott Hotel, London

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### 16.11.2009 – 18.11.2009 Employee Communications, PR & Social Media Summit

Frank X. Shaw (left), corporate VP of Microsoft's corporate communications, will be among the speakers at this conference held at Microsoft's Richmond headquarters.

► Microsoft/Ragan Communications,  
Redmond, USA

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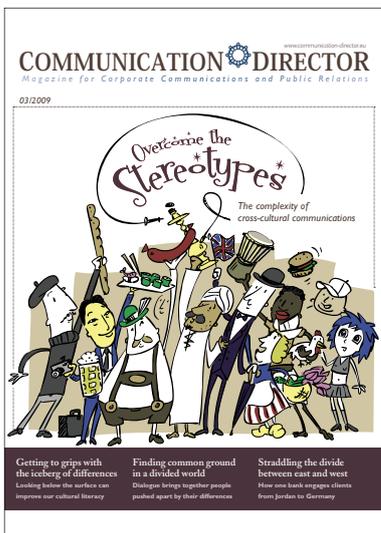
### 12.11.2009 EACD Anniversary

To mark their third anniversary, the European Association of Communication Directors will host this conference on "Regaining Trust", with keynote speeches, case studies and a selection of workshops on a topic that is relevant to many industries in these times of crisis.

► Renaissance Hotel, Brussels

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