



DELIVERING RESULTS FROM THE INSIDE

The walls that divide internal communication from other functions within, and from customers and stakeholders without, are becoming increasingly blurred, with consequences for the corporate strategy.

by Dafydd Phillips and Richard Morgan

In May last year, web designer Dustin Curtis was so aggravated by the frustrations of navigating the American Airlines (AA) website, he took to his blog and labelled his experience “a horrific displeasure”, before going on to design a new model to show how things should be done by a “competent design team”. He may have been very surprised when his fuming rant earned a prompt response from one of the site designers at AA, acknowledging some criticisms while laying the blame on the insurmountable challenges presented by the corporate “culture and processes employed” at AA. The outspoken employee’s 745-word email ended with the sign-off: “Very truly yours (and hoping I don’t get fired for being completely incompetent), Mr. X.” By early November, the employee had been sacked. AA attracted a great deal of criticism for its actions on the net, but Marilyn Sarow, professor of communication at Winthrop University in the US, believes “the employee overstepped the line. He clearly was not malicious in his intent...but he didn’t solve any problems with his explanation. How much more effective it would have been for the employee to use the customer complaint to create a dialogue within the organisation.”

CONVERGING COMMUNICATIONS The dividing line between internal and external flows of communication is becoming a crucial issue

for communicators in the age of multi-directional social media conversations, and will profoundly shape the development of the internal communication function. Mike Klein, a Brussels-based strategic communications expert, explains the dilemma this way: “Employees are an external communication channel,” he says. “They always have been, and these days, their role as an external channel is increasingly visible, important and uncontrolled.” The ability of anyone in the company to be perceived as an unofficial company spokesman means that they have the responsibility not to disclose too much, but it also means that companies must reconfigure their approach to engagement and controlling messages. As the AA case makes clear, it is vital for the internal communications function to educate employees in the dos and don’ts of communication.

NEW CHALLENGE This new challenge adds to the roster of demands on internal communication, and helps explain why often the rest of the company is not always clear on what the definition of the function’s remit is. Helen Farrar, head of internal communications at Virgin Media, believes that “a lot of this comes down to the way that internal communication has grown over the years.” Farrar’s company is developing a strategy whereby every part of the business is engaged in communica-

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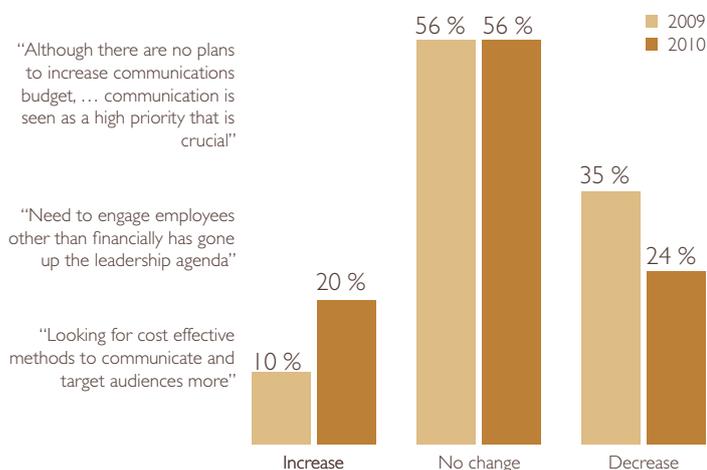
In a survey undertaken in November and December 2009, Allmann Communication looked into how the recession impacts employee communication. Respondents were mainly senior inhouse internal communication and HR specialists across a wide range of businesses and locations. The vast majority, 73 per cent, acknowledged that their business had been negatively affected by the economic slowdown; the impact on employee communications can be seen in the graphs below. Clearly, employee communication remains a top priority, with less than a quarter expecting their employee communications budgets to decrease during 2010 (below left).

As for the employee communications teams themselves, the long-term view shows that most teams would remain unaffected (below right), however 20 per cent would be cut (less than in 2008).

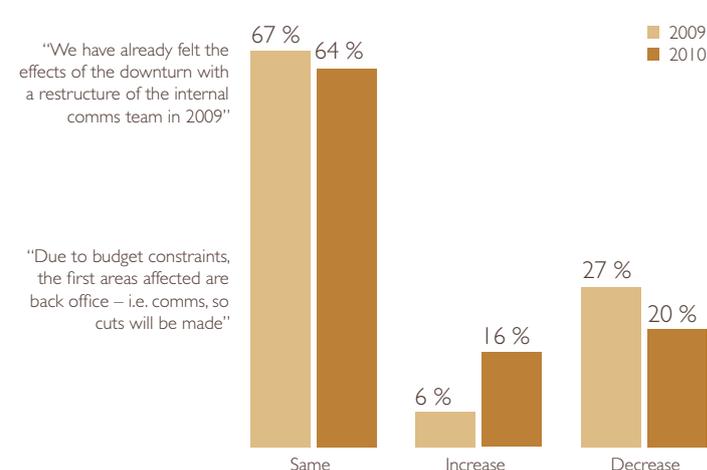
Taken from Allmann Communication Ltd, *Employee Communication In Tough Times*, January 2010

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How Will Your 2010 Spend On Employee Communications Change Compared to 2009?



Will staff numbers remain the same in your employee communication team?



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PERSONNEL



Steffen Seibert
(Spokesman)

Institution: Federal Government
Start: August 11



Germany: New Federal Government spokesman

TV journalist STEFFEN SEIBERT is the new spokesman for Germany's Federal Government. He will replace government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm – director of the Bayerischen Rundfunk – on August 11. Seibert has been an editor and anchor of public broadcaster ZDF's evening news since 2003 and moderator of the leading current affairs programme Heute-Journal since 2007.



Tom Holland
(Group PR Manager)

Institution: Iris



UK: Holland heads communications at Iris

Iris, the UK's largest private software firm, has appointed TOM HOLLAND to lead the group's communications. Responsible for PR, thought leadership and brand activity, Holland will work across the group's five business units; legal, accountancy, not-for-profit and membership organisations, SME and accounting business solutions. Holland joins from Brands2Life where he was PR and communications consultant for six years.



Susanne Wegerhoff
(Vice President,
Communications)

Institution: Opel



Germany: Wegerhoff takes on Klaas' responsibilities at Opel

FRANK KLAAS, director of communications at Opel/Vauxhall, has left his position effective July 01. SUSANNE WEGERHOFF, who has been vice president of Opel communications since February 01, will take over his responsibilities. Wegerhoff's position is newly created and so there will be no successor to Klaas.

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EVENTS



18 – 22.07.2010 IAMCR Conference

This year, the International Association for Media and Communication Research will theme their conference around "Communication and Citizenship - Rethinking Crisis and Change".

► IAMCR, Braga, Portugal

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23.07.2010 Local Corporate Community Involvement

This event will discuss how to get corporate community involvement to work for your employees, and will hear practical experiences in this field from Yell's Corporate Responsibility Manager.

► ConnectReading, Holiday Inn Reading South

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28.07.2010 Pinnacle PR: Media Relations

Specialised international public relations training company Pinnacle PR hold their latest Media Relations course, designed to help attendees to generate more media coverage for your organisation, association or company in the European environment.

► Pinnacle PR, Brussels

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06.08.2010 Tech Breakfast Club

This peer networking and idea sharing club meets quarterly in the Chicago area, and is open to experienced corporate tech PR and marketing professionals. In this gathering, experts will discuss: Enabling the Channel; Corporate Blogging; and Developing/Managing Robust Communities

► Tech Image, Chicago

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