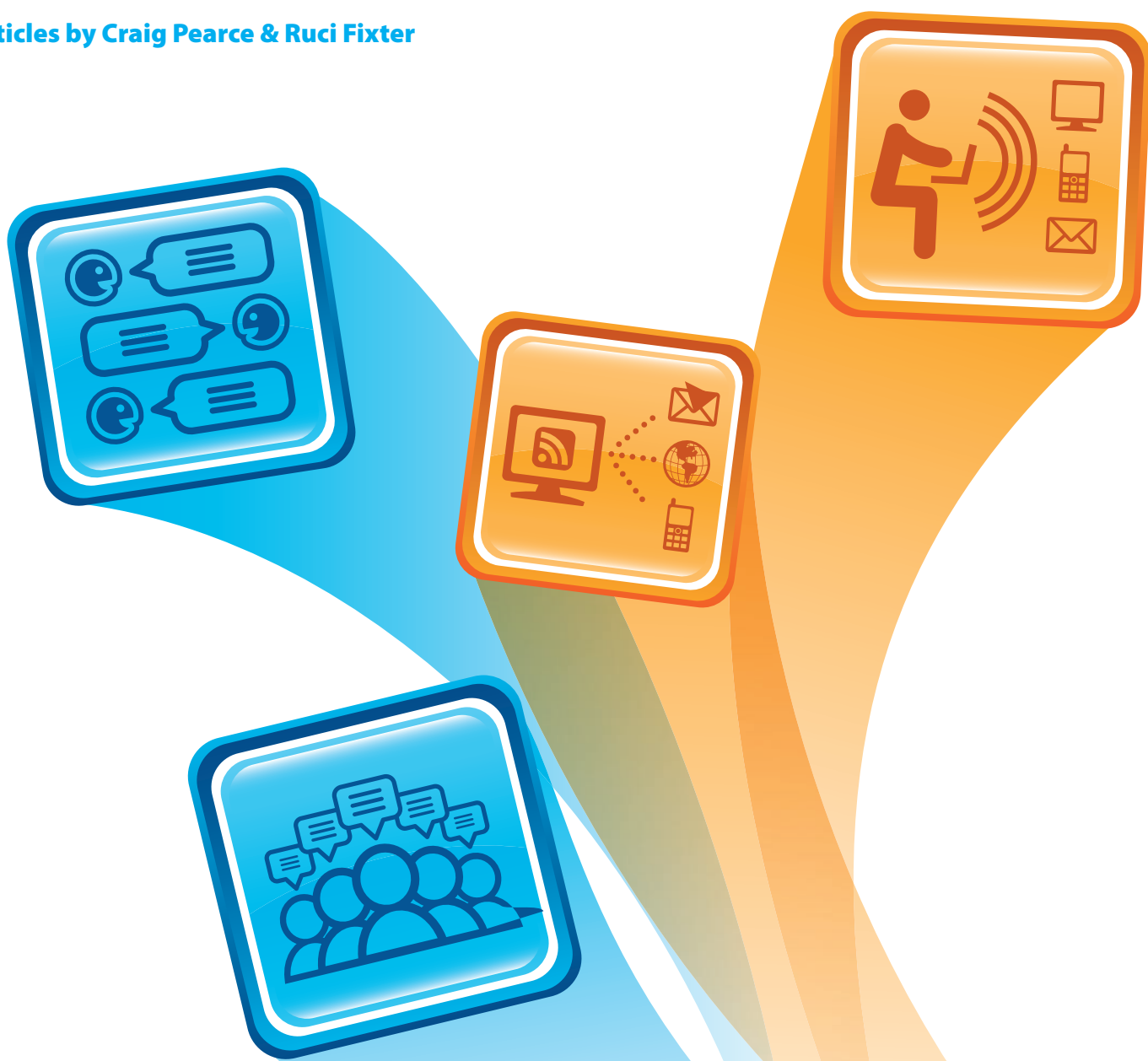


Frocomm Australia's 3rd Annual

New Media Summit 2010

Conference Report

Articles by Craig Pearce & Ruci Fixter



www.frocomm.com.au
t: 02 9489 9010

Researched & Organised by
frocommaustralia

Table of contents

Introductions

Glen Frost welcome2
 Contact the writers.....3
 Editor’s overview: Social media summit drags out the divergence.....4-5
 Craig Pearce: conference overview 24-27

Speakers

PAUL BORRUD, FACEBOOK.....6-7

NAPOLEON BIGGS FLEISHMANN-HILLARD ASIA.....8

LUCINDA BARLOW, GOOGLE AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND9

DAVID QUILTY, TELSTRA 10-11

DAN ILIC, THE HUNGRY BEAST.....12

MATTHEW GAIN, EDELMAN, FORMERLY OF WEBER SHANDWICK 13-15

NICK HOLMES A COURT, BUZZNUMBERS & DAN YOUNG, BURSON MARSTELLER..... 16-17

AVA LAWLER, TEXT 100 18-19

OLIVER PALMER, TIGERSPIKE 20-21

SUE GILCHRIST, FREEHILLS..... 22-23

CRAIG PEARCE 24-27



Welcome to the New Media Summit 2010 Conference Report. I hope you find this report a valuable addition to the conference, or if you didn’t attend, I hope you find lots of great ideas and contacts in the following pages.

New media, social media, digital media... whatever term you prefer, is dramatically changing the way public relations practitioners operate. Digital media is becoming a critical part of any organisations communication; and whether you’re reading this because you’re starting out in digital media and just want to know how to monitor what’s being said about you, or whether you’re keen to expand your digital engagement or you’re looking for new ideas, I hope this report helps your quest.

At the time of the conference, in March 2010, Facebook had 360 million users, now it’s 500 million. Things change fast online. The journey into the digital space has been, and will be, fraught with pitfalls, so I hope you can learn from the mistakes of others; it’s not something you can or should rush into; many organisations polled by Frocomm said they take about a year to finalise their new media strategies; many take at least 3 to 4 months just to analyse what’s being said about them online and to feel comfortable with this arena.

Having said that, new opportunities are popping up all the time, so “what’s new and is it useful?” is a very valid question. But most of all; enjoy the journey.

I would also like to thank the following people for their amazing efforts.

- Thank-you Craig and Ruci. The articles in this report were written by Craig Pearce and Ruci Fixter, from Craig Pearce Strategic Communication and Bluegrass Consulting. Variations of the articles are featured on Craig’s blog, Public relations and managing reputation and Bluegrass Consulting’s Blueblog
- Articles in this report feature content derived in four different ways:
 - Summit presentations by speakers
 - Interviews with speakers post-summit
 - Analysis by Ruci Fixter and Craig Pearce
 - perspectives from other professional communicators, business people and bloggers
- Thank-you to all the speakers for presentations, and also for additional time speakers put into adding value to this report by answering questions from Ruci and Craig

As always, your feedback is welcome.

Kind regards,
 Glen Frost
 E: glenfrost@frocomm.com.au

CONTACT THE AUTHORS

About Craig Pearce Strategic Communication

Craig Pearce is an award winning strategic public relations professional (and noted PR blogger) with 16 years business communication experience. He specialises in formulating, then rolling up his sleeves and implementing, communication strategies that deliver business-relevant results. These strategies utilise corporate communication, marketing communication, issues & crisis management, CSR, media relations and digital communication approaches. With Craig, you get proven global agency-level expertise at a low overhead-driven price.

CPSC contact:

**Craig Pearce, Principal, 0438 003 430,
craig@craigpearce.info,
www.craigpearce.info**

**About Bluegrass**

Bluegrass Consulting is a government relations, public affairs and corporate communication consultancy with experience across a range of issues-rich sectors such as property, manufacturing, health, utilities, energy, defence, sustainability and automotive. It undertakes traditional and digital advocacy, government bids, media liaison, issues management, crisis communication, marketing communication and digital communication for its clients.

Bluegrass contacts:

**Ruci Fixter ruci@bluegrass.com.au
OR Rodd Pahl, Managing Director,
02 9377 1170,
rodd@bluegrass.com.au,
www.bluegrass.com.au**



How The Web Is Changing PR

Trust, crowds (utilisation of, communicating to, segmenting of...), integration (or not) of social media and corporate websites, the death of 'networked' communication, content generation issues and the challenges of change within social media were some of the primary themes that were either explicitly stated at the 2010 Frocomm New Media Summit, bubbled under its surface or were notable not for their articulation, but by their surprising absence...

The summit was a gathering of some leading minds of the Australian public relations and social media industries, as well as a large and enthusiastically interactive audience. There was an interesting balance of presentations that took a helicopter strategic view, along with those that were more hands on/tactically-based, with both leavened by plenty of case studies.

But perhaps the most notable message that comes out of gatherings like this is: don't sit there and vacillate; get in and get your

There was an interesting balance of presentations that took a helicopter strategic view, along with those that were more hands on/tactically-based, with both leavened by plenty of case studies.

hands dirty; expertise comes with experience, not the endless pondering of ramifications.

Of course, the way we as communication professionals act should depend on evidence-based market research. We should consider all the options and seek to apply best practice methodologies.

But social media is still evolving at a rapid rate. Each strategy and its tactical dimensions need to be customised to the business outcome sought, to the relevant target audiences and to the issue/product/service at hand.

At the end of the day, your communication activity may be the first of its kind. So whilst you can listen and learn and formulate, the best answer to your social media dilemma may just be to do. But don't dive in thinking you are going to kill it from the start.

Strive to become the expert. But, as many speakers stated or implied, humility and adaptability are valuable. Pack them in your baggage.

Trust your public relations

The notion of trust was elemental to many of the presentations at the summit. That is because trust is what social media is defined as helping generate (if not accelerate). Trust, of course, helps generate positive word of mouth, the holy grail of marketers:

- free endorsement of products, services and organisations
 - the viral, no charge (well, sort of...) snowball effect (and especially when exercised through social media)
 - extrapolation into increased sales/profits.
- Social media platforms, as Brendon Hughes recently wrote, "have changed our definition of friend." The interesting question that Brendon posed was: "Is social media making trust weaker or stronger?" His feeling is that social media is not delivering as broad a degree of trust as marketers might like to think.

Social media, corporate website or trad media?

The question of where the greatest influence on consumers will emanate from in coming years was not asked at the summit. This surprised me. Options I put on the table to some of the speakers included:

- Social media sources
- Corporate websites
- Traditional (in both 'hard' and digital format) media.

Of course, it isn't an either/or zero-sum game. Shades of grey are permitted!

Strive to become the expert. But, as many speakers stated or implied, humility and adaptability are valuable. Pack them in your baggage.

But as I discuss in a series of posts from my blog that are included in this report, PR needs to work harder at website communication opportunities. Strategic communication, especially those elements with a digital bent, should be wary about putting all their tactical eggs in the social media basket. The corporate website has an opportunity to:

- provide engaging, useful and credible information to stakeholders
- rank higher in web searches because of this content, intelligent backlinking strategies and appropriate technical IT support
- act as a hub for social media activity.

OVERVIEW

This thinking has been reinforced, according to Andrew Hughes of Reprise Media, because Google changes means brands need to focus more on content and one of the best ways to do this is, "publish as much relevant content on your own website..."

But as I discuss in a series of posts from my blog that are included in this report, PR needs to work harder at website communication opportunities.

PR: experts in content generation? Content. What a hassle. What an opportunity!

But...if you don't got it, you don't got nothing to say. It's the elephant in the room. Generating content valued by your target audiences takes time and a lot of it. Think of all the social media platforms to feed. Recycling and customisation will work to a degree, but this won't entirely sate the beast. So where are the resources coming from?

And who can't love the switch that Matthew Gain pulled on summit attendees, saying we need to think like journos when creating content for our organisations, not like PR pros. This is a favourite topic of David Meerman Scott, the king advocate of corporate website communication.

Behind content are two further themes: creativity and viral. All three work together. A major challenge with social media is getting consumers to advocate the content. For it to go viral. This might occur because it is fun, because it is creative, because it is relevant to consumers' lifestyles or because it exhibits thought leadership.

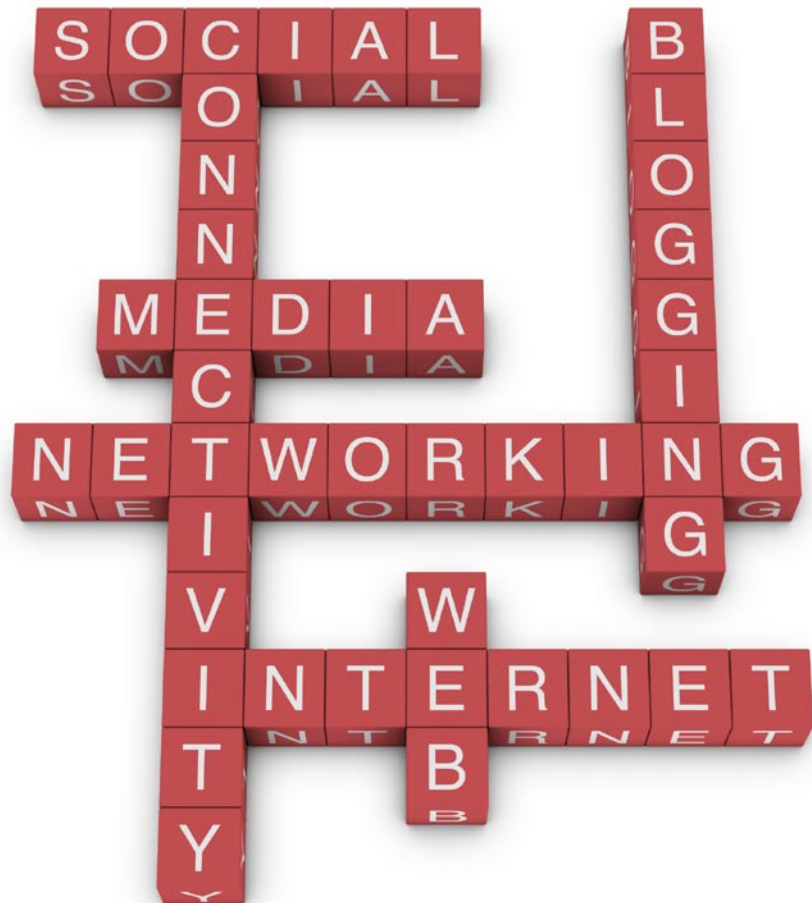
Thought leadership works if it:

- provides Point of Difference
- adds value to target audiences' lifestyles
- is relevant to the organisation or brand that is promulgating it.

Networked communication is dead; long live the niche

Dan Ilic said it at the summit. Seth Godin has said it in the context of micro magazines. And Mike 'Zappy' Zapolin said it at a recent conference: niche is winning the war. Broadcast, big reach media networks are dead.

But this notion of big-reach communication being almost dead, whether it is in the context of media outlets, social media or other forms of communication,



A very big challenge in going niche, in being very targeted and customised, is the ROI.

seems to me to be just a tad precious.

PR and marketing folk love reaching as many eyeballs as possible. So do clients and CEOs. (It makes for impressive reading in monthly reports, after all.) And I bet it is likely that a lot of direct mail is undertaken based on stats that underline that though there is a lot of waste, so is there sufficient ROI to keep on cutting down forests.

A very big challenge in going niche, in being very targeted and customised, is the ROI. Smaller audiences should mean, in theory, smaller investment (unless this audience is the influencer on a wider group). But easier said than done.

So whilst I love the notion, I'm not so sure some of the talk on this topic isn't just a little specious. I fully expect there to be further debate on this topic, with warring tribes fully armed with rationales and statistics supporting their views.

Summary

The change that is occurring in the social media/new media/digital communication/traditional (on and offline versions) environment is intense. In the time it has taken to produce this report, here is a minuscule selection of some of the topics and issues that have arisen:

- doubts over Twitter's efficacy for tactical/sales generating communication
- MySpace regaining momentum through Facebook's perceived privacy failings
- The relentless ascent up the social media mountain of Foursquare
- Apple's patenting of a Facebook/iPhone app.

Who has time to keep up? Can we pay someone to filter this information for us? Social media is forcing the PR professional pay a heavy price for staying on the ball.

In regard to the summit, only a few of its themes have been flagged here. The rest are in the articles featured in the report. Please let Glen Frost and I know what you think about the content and how we can provide more useful resources for you in the future to help you do your job as a professional communicator.

Craig Pearce
craig@craigpearce.info
www.craigpearce.info

Strategic communication with Facebook



Paul Borrud from Facebook speaking at the conference

The value, and key, to utilising the world's social media darling to its full extent lies in comprehensive targeting, compelling advertising, putting product in users' hands and continuing the relationship with communication that truly engages with, and provides value to, target audiences...said Paul Borrud, General Manager, Facebook Australia, at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit.

Paul's presentation was timely. Facebook is everywhere. In 2010 it has gone ballistic in the virtual sense. If there is one social media brand to have your hands all over right now, Facebook is it.

It is the most visited website in the US, outranking even Google, though it still doesn't have Google's reach. And Facebook is the most searched term across search engines.

This raises important issues for communicators:

- Is social media (or more specifically, Facebook!) where greater resources should be directed rather than Google Adwords, corporate websites, SEO etc (in both the digital and overarching comms mix)?
- Is social media (or, once again, just Facebook) where searches for information are, or will primarily, take place for information?
- Is the sort of information and the type of communication that occurs within Facebook something that public relations professionals are able to control?

Other facts to raise the communicator's eyebrow include:

- Over seven million Australians are 'active' Facebook users
- Globally, it has over 500 million active users
- In Australia, over 35s is the fastest growing sector

Is the sort of information and the type of communication that occurs within Facebook something that public relations professionals are able to control?

- 18-24 year olds are the core group of users, with 79% of those engaged using it more than email, 38% more than mobile phones and 35% more than any other 'communication device'
- Facebook operates in 75 languages
- Three billion+ photos are uploaded on to Facebook each month (and this is not a 'photo site')
- 20 million users become fans of pages each day.

Thoughts on communication strategy

From a strategic communication perspective, Paul advocated integrating all brand extensions into the same fan page, rather than running a different fan page for each product. Over time, there can be a focus on different products (or services) at different times.

Certainly, this solves one of professional communicators' greatest dilemmas, that of consistently generating quality content of interest to target audiences.

On the other hand, however, who is to say the brand of one product, despite being the property of a single organisation, will suit the tastes/aspirations/etc of another brand/product? Will it lead to a weakening of individual brands' equity? Classic marketing

thinking would seem to suggest so.

Paul defined his approach to communication into three phases:

- Build a fan base
- Use fans as a focus group
- Launch new product.

As with any form of social media, Paul said a basic premise of using Facebook for commercial purposes is to provide value to your network (or fans).

Somewhat conversely, Paul said to apply the 70/30 rule (i.e. get your network to provide 70% of the content and you just provide 30% – great thought! Easier said than done, though no doubt the clever strategist will come up with solutions to this formidable challenge.)

The notion of authenticity is social media 101, of course. In fact, it should be strategic public relations 101, but that's another story. A manifestation of this in a commercial sense is, as Paul said, "Asking for forgiveness, not permission." This has at least two implications:

- Get stuck into social media. Don't hang around waiting and watching. The only way to leverage is to participate
- Whilst being sensitive to the needs of your stakeholders is of course important, so is realising that mistakes are made. Social media is a new field. It's okay to step out of line if your intentions are good (if they aren't, go back to PR school), so say you're sorry and you'll try harder to get it right next time: but don't hang around waiting for someone to say, 'yes, you may give this a try now'.

As Paul said after the summit, "Conversations about brands are happening regardless of whether or not the brands want to take part. They can be a passive observer or an active participant. When you're active you can shape your brand in front of a large audience, which will pay dividends."

“Conversations about brands are happening regardless of whether or not the brands want to take part. They can be a passive observer or an active participant. When you’re active you can shape your brand in front of a large audience, which will pay dividends.”

There are doubtless some nuances to Paul’s claim that organisations can shape their brand. Plenty of pundits have espoused that it is not organisations that shape brands, it is those who use them. Social media has accelerated this ability of brand ‘users’ to shape what constitutes a brand (i.e. what it represents).

So the notion of who is controlling or shaping a brand is a field ripe for debate and further insight.

Facebook outranking market research?

The issue of using fans as a focus group is a particularly interesting application of a social network. On the one hand it is engaging with target audiences so an organisation can adapt a product and adapt its communication to suit the needs and preferences of those it is seeking to sell to.

But on the other hand this is using two-way symmetrical communication purely to sell a product, rather than do the target audience any big favours. It is marketing

One of professional communicators’ greatest dilemmas, that of consistently generating quality content of interest to target audiences

adopting a best practice public relations methodology to dress up its profit-making objective. But it is doing so in a very transparent manner, so it is hard to argue that everyone isn’t a winner through this process.

Another interesting dimension of using social media for research is whether social media:

- will overtake formal market research as a means to determine target audience needs and wants
- become a standard means through which to test potential products’ and services’ market potential and effectiveness
- develop methodologies for communication metrics to be developed that clearly elucidate the effectiveness of professional communication to achieve business-relevant results.

Social media conversations: who if profiting?

Paul was adamant that social media is about relationships, not marketing. Yet Facebook (like many other forms of social media), is a mechanism that exists, at least partially, for advertisers, marketers and public relations professionals to help organisations achieve their business objectives.

So the mentality that says ‘social media is about relationships, not marketing’ is either specious or, in fact, social media is facilitating a new way to do business, a new way for organisations to think. This is an approach that has been articulated before, but it is worth reiterating:

- The dialogic characteristics of social media are forcing organisations to talk more with their target audiences and stakeholders than they might have pre-social media
- It seems logical to hypothesise that increased dialogue leads to increased understanding which, finally, leads to organisations actually wanting to change their behaviour as a whole (not just in the context of communication)
- The rationale underpinning this is that if an increased number of conversations occur between an organisation and its stakeholders, then unless the needs and preferences of those stakeholders impact on the way an organisation behaves, then those conversations will eventually be seen by stakeholders as meaningless. This, in turn, is liable to lead to compromised relationships, a less favourable organisational reputation and, ultimately, a failure to meet business objectives.

The critical upshot question for Facebook

Is there a risk that its seeming increasing use by marketers will devalue the Facebook brand, one founded on the notion of sharing personal information and networking with friends?

Commerce is everywhere these days (McDonald’s provides encouragement awards/meal vouchers to my son’s soccer and Nippers clubs – much to my chagrin) and people seem very open to commercial intrusion into their lives. So maybe it’s a null and void question/argument.

Certainly, the internet is a pretty social and open environment, so it’s hard to argue that its mechanical communication devices should be devoid of commercial trappings. But there does seem something paradoxical about the notion of personal networking and the commercialism that Facebook’s business model seems predicated on.

It’s unlikely, however, that this will impact on Facebook’s utility as both a social networking tool and a means for professional communicators to facilitate engagement between an organisation/brand and its stakeholders.

So the mentality that says ‘social media is about relationships, not marketing’ is either specious or, in fact, social media is facilitating a new way to do business, a new way for organisations to think.

Focusing on Facebook results

Paul concluded his presentation by reminding attendees of what to focus on:

- Leveraging the social graph
- Building your brand and shaping it
- Get started and iterate
- Develop a conversational calendar.

Search: The Reputation Gateway

“Search is the reputation gateway,” said Napoleon Biggs, VP Digital Fleischmann-Hillard Asia at Frocomm’s 2010 New Media Summit. And whilst this claim seems accurate in our web-wound up world, his claims that social media will soon be the primary source of information on organisations, rather than the latter’s corporate site, is not aligned with the views of commentators such as David Meerman Scott.

Yet, as Facebook now ranks as the number one go-to website over Google in the US, there is evidence to suggest Napoleon is on the money. It seems a fair assumption that many of the visits to Facebook will be to seek information (in a social sort of way, of course) on organisations, products and services.

Napoleon (@webwednesday) mentioned the rather scary notion of 440 million people around the world sharing their opinions on Facebook alone. You can’t blame organisations and brands for quaking a little in their gumboots just a little – all that control they used to have...gone in the click of a mouse!

The march towards dialogue also has ramifications for the marketing element of professional communication.

Communication, engagement... or a ‘listening brief’?

So what should organisations do about this? Engage? Or continue the command-and-control paradigm (or, in the communication context, the broadcast rather than engage model) that may have served them quite well in the past? Or are there alternatives to the reductive black and white scenario?

As much as the contemporary communicator is schooled in the notion of dialogue and engagement above all else, even James Grunig said there is a time and a place for two-way asymmetrical communication (i.e. communication taking place that maintains an organisation’s ‘power’ over its stakeholders or,

to put it another way, not communicating, not engaging and probably just listening).

And it may simply be because of the nature of the organisation, or the nature of the issue, that a bunkering down approach is taken. It doesn’t necessarily mean an organisation is seeking to maintain any sort of Machiavellian control.

The march towards dialogue also has ramifications for the marketing element of professional communication. All this talk of engagement has changed the language of marketing, but I doubt very much whether it has changed its essential behaviour or processes.

Marketing is still there to identify a need, turn it into a want and sell the living daylights out of it. Just because there is a conversation around the process doesn’t change its essential intent or objective.

Approaches to professional digital communication

Napoleon’s presentation had a strong focus on China, with an underlying key message being that, as always, professional communicators need to:

- customise content and messages for different stakeholders or target audiences
- utilise the communication mechanisms that are most salient for an organisation’s target audiences.

His tips on utilising social media?

- Digital is raw, live: don’t stand back and vacillate. Get in there and get active
- Don’t try to fake it – online is a unique environment where mistakes are amplified and permanent
- Strategic and proactive offence (i.e. communication) is the best defence for an organisation’s reputation...so build relationships by engaging with organisational advocates AND naysayers

When in a crisis situation, Napoleon said social media needs to be monitored to determine:

- what/who are the conversation/information sources and how is it spreading?
- who are the influencers?
- what is the emotional context?
- what actions are crisis participants taking?

This information is vital in determining what crisis management responses organisations should take. Fundamentally, however, you should have a game plan prepared, advised

Napoleon. And one of the key strategic elements of this game plan is no doubt being flexible.

The online environment is not stable. Left-field is where you can expect your next challenge to come from!

Corporate websites: the digital sanctuary?

One of the interesting elements of what is not being spoken about terribly much in public relations circles (and did not seem to be flagged at all during the New Media Summit – not ‘new’ enough?!) is ‘content’.

Now, the content of an organisation’s website is potentially the element that will attract the most possible eyeballs. And lead to the greatest amount of engagement.

So why aren’t PR pros talking about this? Why aren’t they pitching it to potential clients? What focus is occurring here regarding the strategy and tactical/technical skills to make a difference to organisations and their stakeholders?

This is especially important when Napoleon makes the point that people are using the web for purchasing advice. Don’t organisations want to get in on the action of leveraging, highlighting and/or influencing the advice that is given?

Sure, there will be hesitation and scepticism from many in utilising content provided by organisations, but with the power of SEO and the resources that organisations have at their disposal, it would seem a potent opportunity they have at their fingertips.

And are consumers really so gullible to think that organisation-initiated, sponsored, moderated and, yes, even involved or monitored social media dialogues are completely free of an organisation’s grip?

As the web is a fractured environment full of dissenting voices, most of them small in stature and characterised by inconsistency and a lack of evidence for their assertions, organisational websites are almost like the calm amongst the storm: a digital sanctuary.

Also, organisations should be employing strategic communication approaches such as strategic alliances and thought leadership. Using such approaches gives the organisation 3rd party credibility and content that their stakeholders will value.

This, then, supports their attempts to have their websites (and, by extension, themselves) perceived as being credible.



Social media communication generating trust

It should come as no surprise to hear that Google, one of the most potent organisations in the world, has trust as one of its positioning lynchpins... yet in a (business) world still coming to terms with the fact that those defining a brand are more often its stakeholders than the brand itself, this is still close to being revolutionary, especially if it is being effectively put into action, rather than simply being pontificated on.

Lucinda Barlow, Google Australia and New Zealand's Head of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, put forward this premise at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit. "We all work for and represent brands and brands are all about trust," Lucinda said. "People have certain expectations of a brand and that's what we have to portray."

But are all brands about trust? I don't think so. Australian Wheat Board? Rio Tinto? Westpac? Not exactly high-performing brands in the trust stakes.

Google are a fascinating entity in many ways, but their confluence of the dimensions of communication, products and societal centrality is one aspect of this. As a result of this it possesses an enormous amount of power:

- The power over people's ability to access information (including information being organised in a manner customised to people's varying 'niche needs')
- The power over people's means of accessing information

"We all work for and represent brands and brands are all about trust," Lucinda said. "People have certain expectations of a brand and that's what we have to portray."

"Google's mission is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful,"

- The power of influencing government and regulatory regimes.

In summary, this means the company is playing a significant role in shaping society itself.

The power of giving away control

Lucinda (@lucindabarlow) describes Google as having collaboration at its heart and giving up power to its stakeholders. What a breath of fresh air for a public relations professional!

"Google's mission is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," said Lucinda. "This means giving our users around the world access to the information they want, from the widest variety of sources, wherever they are."

And it is interesting to note that, despite its competition being, "one click away," Lucinda said Google's policy is not to lock people into utilising the products it develops, but to, "allow customers to move their data out of Google's services easily."

"We have a dedicated engineering team, working across all products, called the 'Data Liberation Front' to make this happen. To keep you coming back, we have to keep innovating to create great services that are important to people and change their lives."

Making it easy to not use Google has a number of implications for a professional communicator:

- It gives more power to consumers to set the terms of the relationship. In fact, with products like Google Maps, consumers have the power to actually change the parameters of the product itself
- It is empowering the consumer to be a participant in the brand, not an observer
- The numerous listening and interactive posts it has in the online environment reflect the way its business model is

profoundly influenced by its stakeholders' knowledge, views and behaviour.

Analogous to this is the approach that Lucinda said Google takes to its stakeholder communication: "We need to be fast, responsive, open and transparent in our communication."

Eavesdropping for insights

"There is a large and growing audience of people who actively listen to, distribute and publish their opinions online," said Lucinda. "This gives real power to the vocal minority. According to Nielsen, in Australia 45% of people online publish their opinions specifically about products, services, and brands online and a massive 86% read them. It's such an influential space."

"When you probe what the most trusted sources of information are, word of mouth comes out tops followed by online...because online is seen as a way to scale 'word of mouth' and tap into it en masse."

"And you're not just about managing what gets said about your brand in order to effect sales directly. It's also about consumer insight. It's like being permanently tapped in to the world's largest focus group. Our users decide what's popular and what they want to watch."

"There is a large and growing audience of people who actively listen to, distribute and publish their opinions online," said Lucinda. This gives real power to the vocal minority.

They talk about it. They debate with each other. Those comments are gold. Just ask United Airlines..."

Social responsibility

The power of Google means it has a more profound, socially pervasive social responsibility than most organisations. Its enormous global reach (i.e. all stratas of virtually all societies) make this more challenging for Google than most, as different societies and their various elements all have differing expectations of organisations.

As long as trust remains central to its business model, however, it has a reliable compass with which to steer itself. Communication, and public relations in particular, is the ideal mechanism to facilitate this journey occurring.

Telstra Embraces Social Media



David Quilty, Telstra

Big companies have no choice but to bite the bullet and get amongst social media, said Telstra's Group Managing Director, Public Policy and Communications, David Quilty, at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit. This is despite most CEOs seeing it as unnecessary, too tricky, or simply too risky.

Australia's corporations need to use social media alongside and integrated within their traditional marketing and public relations activities, David said.

Some will fail, some will succeed, but there is no choice but to do it. "It forces you to learn as you go."

But he warned it's a long journey which carries massive risk and companies have every reason to be scared. Some will fail, some will succeed, but there is no choice but to do it. "It forces you to learn as you go."

David defines social media as word of mouth moving online. Except now it's not just for one person to hear. Rather, it's for the whole world to see and talk about.

He explained that all companies understand the importance of word of mouth recommendations or criticism and

they exercise marketing or communication campaigns to combat or encourage this. As such, the same needs to apply to social media.

David reiterated now well known social media advice, such as:

- Respect the space
- Don't speak in a corporate language
- Provide helpful information and assistance
- Don't moderate comments; learn and evolve from criticism (i.e. use it as a resource).

Public relations and public affairs: strategic social applications

David was asked did he see any one social networking medium as having more value, or being more beneficial than another.

"I think it's very much horses for courses," he responded. "Certain social networking media suit different purposes better than others.

"For example, blogging may be seen as a bit 'old hat' but it has real potential in terms of influential commentaries on products. Recently, Telstra initiated for the first time a social media review program for our HTC Desire Android Smartphone. Up to 25 social media reviewers will test the device and report their findings through various online mediums, including blogs and Twitter."

David's assertion that blogs have potential for further leveraging is replicated in a study that Jeff Bullus discusses on his blog, titled How Will Marketers Change Their Social Media Activities in The Future? Blogs came out top at 81% beating Facebook, the current heavyweight champion of the world!

David was also quizzed on whether there might be an occasion where an organisation wouldn't respond to an online statement or request.

"In general it makes good business sense to be responsive in the online world," said David. "Just as it does in the offline world. Of course, the online environment is susceptible to various scams and spamming, so it's important to be on the lookout for potential traps.

David also commented on the interesting area of using social media as a platform to rally customer support on a policy issue.

"In the past, Telstra has used the online environment to try and garner support from shareholders and customers on policy issues affecting the company. Currently, we use Telstra's corporate website and email to keep our shareholders updated on issues that might impact on their investments in Telstra.

"Interestingly, we have found that people are more inclined to take a keen interest in issues if they are simply provided with

blogging may be seen as a bit 'old hat' but it has real potential in terms of influential commentaries on products



the underlying facts rather than actively encouraged to take a particular position.”

PR utility: social media or corporate website?

There has been a blizzard of action and discussion on social media but nowhere nearly as much on website communication. With the power of SEO these days, David was asked did he think that an opportunity is being missed here?

“A valid observation,” David concurred. “For most businesses, the corporate website is the primary online face for customers, shareholders and stakeholders. It’s very important to have a corporate website presence that’s aligned with one’s brand and enhances ones’ reputation.

“People today want to know more about the companies they deal with than they did a decade ago; not just about the products and service they sell, but also their community investments and environmental performance.

“With so much information to choose from, the challenge is to keep corporate websites easy for visitors to use and to find the information they are seeking.

“For most businesses, the corporate website is the primary online face for customers”

...using social media as a platform to rally customer support on a policy issue.

“While social networks are unlikely to replace corporate websites in the foreseeable future, businesses are increasingly likely to use a strategic combination of the two to interact with their customers and stakeholders. Websites will become much more interactive and video-based while social networks will become a more influential determinant of customer purchasing decisions.”

Left turn, right turn, learning on the social media run

David was also provided some firsthand experience about the challenges that arise from staff using social media.

Last year Telstra employee Leslie Nassar caused a PR nightmare when he outed himself as the author of popular Twitter feed, ‘Fake Stephen Conroy’. His posts anonymously ridiculed the federal Communications Minister. Not the smartest move when he is the Minister responsible for Telstra’s sector.

Telstra struggled awkwardly with the situation at first but soon realised that your employees can be your best advocates.

With 40,000 Telstra staff, using social media is a significant opportunity and makes particular sense when you are a telecommunications company. “They are

going to talk about you anyway, so the best way is to encourage them to talk about you in a positive way,” said David.

So Telstra introduced their 3 R’guard rails’ of social media engagement:

- Respect (understand the way social media works)
- Responsibility (look to do it in a factual way – if you can use public information, do it)
- Representation (e.g. say you work for Telstra).

In the spirit of the ‘openness’ that defines the medium, Telstra released their guidelines publicly which garnered plenty of media interest, most of which was positive. The 3Rs is now a compulsory training module for staff.

...there is real genuineness to the social community

Making for social media success

David concluded by saying there is real genuineness to the social community. They want to see that social media can make a difference to people’s lives. If you do the right thing they are grateful for it and you will be rewarded through trust, loyalty and improved reputation. If you don’t, you will be punished.

Either way, you have no choice but to start. Eventually – if you are consistent, genuine and provide value for your stakeholders – you will succeed.

TV Is Dead, Long Live TV

TV as we know it, or more specifically the networks themselves, is dead. But TV as a medium is not fatally wounded, Dan Ilic told Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit and a move from 'network' TV to 'networked' TV, such as peer-to-peer TV, is on its way.

The predicted death of the networks is attributed to the high cost of broadcasting compared to the internet's ability to offer cheap, and also live, viewing. But it is also the networks' descent from flourishing cultural hubs to organisations lacking accountability, credibility, independence and creativity that has sealed their fate.

The Media Beast – gullible or just lazy?

An example of the problem infecting networks became all too apparent when a dummy report from Dan and his Hungry Beast Team (the show is no longer on air) generated 24 radio reports, as well as News Ltd and Fairfax press, despite saying the report was made up/fictional. Indeed, it was only Media Watch that picked up on it.

This Hungry Beast prank was inspired by a study conducted by Crikey and UTS looking into the spin cycle of journalism which found that up to 70% of stories we read are based on some sort of PR activity.

Indeed, the media beast is a hungry one and that, in many ways, is its undoing. Not that The Hungry Beast (the proper noun, not the collective common noun version) itself intends letting society off easy...

Cathy, Betty and Sally watch Network TV in the western suburbs

Dan doesn't paint an all too pretty picture of the people watching commercial networked TV, describing a typical audience as female, middle aged with kids who drink Bacardi Breezers for breakfast (the mothers not the children...). He also suggests they come from lower social economic suburbs such as Betty who comes from Blacktown, Cathy from Campbelltown and Sally from St. Clair (Penrith).

And it is in the very nature of broadcasting that it must be of broad enough interest to attract large audiences, thus making it boring,

he said. But digital/web mediums mean TV can, instead, offer targeted programs and do so for a lot less money.

Peer to Peer TV is the future

So what does the future hold? According to Dan, a move from Network TV to networked TV, such as peer-to-peer TV (P2PTV). A P2PTV is a system where each user, while downloading a video stream, is simultaneously also uploading that stream to other users, thus contributing to the overall available bandwidth. Already countries like Norway are making peer to peer TV.

It is in the very nature of broadcasting that it must be of broad enough interest to attract large audiences, thus making it boring

The software is designed to redistribute video streams in real time on a P2P network. The distributed video streams are mostly TV channels from all over the world, potentially making TV channels globally available, but they can also come from other sources.

Dan identifies generational impacts as the key factor in driving this change. The digital divide between older and younger generations is already well known and visible, but to further illustrate this, Dan referred to Lawrence Lessig's work which shows the digital divide between Gen Ys in different countries is smaller than that between younger and older people in the same country.

Let the content do the talking

Like all media, content is king and nowhere is this more obvious than in online viral video. In addition, when using viral video, Dan said sometimes subverting your brand is the greatest way to attract people to your brand and build its reputation, as in the case of the creators of the Beached Whale video.



Dan Ilic, Downwind Media

"Beached as bro" making money from viral video

The 'Beached Whale' ads were put online in 2008 and sent to a few people but failed to gain a lot of traction. It wasn't until Flight of the Conchords placed it on their website and Fairfax Digital added it to their online publications that it went off, getting around 40,000 hits a day in 2009. The video has now had over 5.5 million hits. This massive attention spawned a merchandise line through CafePress which now generates around 9K a month, but started at about 20K a month.

The creators say they have collectively sold over \$1 million worth of Beached Whale products globally and, in fact, the plan was always to use Beached Whale as, "a proof of concept for utilising free distribution channels of social networking tools with a financial return."

Tips for creating successful viral video

Dan's advice for creating the best virals is to:

- stay strong on character, content and narrative
- make an emotional connection
- stay true to the idea.

In an interview with Stellar Blog, he also notes that controversy, celebrity and comedy are also obvious winners. In regards to length he suggests between 45 seconds and 3 minutes, with about a laugh a minute.

Whether TV or viral video, it is important to remember content is key, laughs score highly and entertainment value is paramount.

Dan is the man

Dan Ilic (@danilic) is an Australian comedian, writer, performer, actor, broadcaster, and filmmaker. He is best known for his work on the sketch comedy TV show The Ronnie Johns Half Hour, and writing and performing in Beaconsfield: The Musical. Dan is also a reporter/presenter on the ABC show Hungry Beast.

Embracing Facebook



Matthew Gain

The key to engaging stakeholders through Facebook, said then Weber Shandwick's, but now Edelman's, Matthew Gain at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit, is identifying existing communities where fans can be recruited, forming strategic alliances, leveraging off existing communication platforms and utilising Facebook advertising.

Matthew's (@matthewgain) presentation was one of the most informative of the summit, providing attendees with a wealth of hands-on knowledge. For this reason, and the value-add he provided for this report after the summit, the discussion of his presentation has been broken into two articles. This one focuses on tactical aspects of utilising Facebook for public relations results, whilst the companion piece discusses more strategic dimensions of the platform.

Prior to encouraging us to get our virtual hands dirty, however, he provided these daunting (or inspiring, for professional communicators) stats:

- 9 million Australians regularly interact with social media
- 83 per cent of Australians use Facebook as their number one social networking destination
- 75 per cent of Australians with internet access have visited Facebook
- more than half a million Australians over the age of 55 are on Facebook.

These are daunting figures because of a few factors:

- Social media must be at least be considered for any public relations strategy
- Public relations' and marketing's capability in social media marketing is still relatively immature
- The rapidly changing nature of individual social media platformss – including Facebook – as well as the genre as a whole
- Whilst the numbers of social media users are large, it is segmentation (or target audiences), customisation (of information) and the production of a sufficient amount of useful, relevant and engaging content are, and will remain, significant challenges.

The Facebook Page: an overview

What is a Facebook Page?

- A public profile page for your brand
- It generates fans who 'like' (previously fan) your brand, not friends
- Page updates are sent to fans' newsfeeds
- It creates an environment for two-way communication.

The Facebook Page wall:

- Primary platform for ongoing communication with your fans
- Fans can comment on, or 'like', posts
- Unless turned off, fans can post to the wall
- Only comments made by page admins will be sent to fans' newsfeeds.

Getting dirty hands with Facebook

Some of the elements that can be included on Facebook Pages include:

- A fully customisable tab within your Facebook page

- Run competitions, giveaways and quizzes
- Photos – uploading photos that represent your brand or campaigns
- Videos – uploading relevant video content
- Notes – import an RSS feed from your blog or Twitter feed
- Discussions – host forum like discussions.

Communication medium marketing cross-promotion

There are a number of actions that can be taken to drive traffic to your fan page:

- Add a link to your website
- Hyperlinks from employee email footers
- Drive traffic from your other social media platforms: blog(s), Twitter, YouTube
- Include a URL in advertising creative
- Include in customer newsletters or CRM communication
- Integrate into events and the event promotional collateral
- Include on customer receipts and product packaging.

Advertising recommended by a PR professional?!

Matthew advocates the use of FB advertising as it:

- is extremely targeted
- does not require a large investment (PR people are advertising cheapskates, you see...)
- is easy to set up and doesn't require extensive FB liaison
- most importantly, is highly effective.

Measurement

There are a number of benchmarks that can be used to measure the impact of Facebook communication. They include:

- Fan base: number of fans; growth of fan base
- Interaction: number of comments/likes; sharing of content; completion entries
- Comments tone: positive/negative
- Offline activity: voucher take up, retail footfall.

One of the simplest modes of measurement is asking each customer at the cash register, "what prompted you to visit our store today?" This is rarely done, but it can't be hard for the result to be registered at the check out.

Also, simple market research programs using free tools like SurveyMonkey can be implemented after a specific campaign to delve into fan reactions (a few inexpensive incentive prizes can be thrown in). Even a poll

on the page can give you some insight into fan behaviour.

Integrating communication mechanisms was flagged earlier. The challenge of monitoring them, which then leads to at least a qualitative form of evaluation, can be helped by using social media aggregation tools, such as Hootsuite, Tweetdeck (not just for Twitter – fancy that!) and Yoono and more, wrote Sarah Hartshorn recently.

Whatever approach you take, Matthew counselled, "Facebook objectives should be aligned with your broader business objectives, otherwise what is the point?"

Do not do this

Matthew warned there are some behaviours that those who run the fan pages must obey – or suffer the reputational consequences.

They include:

- Don't create the site/page then abandon it

- This is not a push environment. Create the content, provide the value and the fun, then they will come – no spam!
- Do not delete comments: instead, engage and address
- Don't alienate existing communities: work with them, explain and illustrate the value of your page, look to work together and integrate interests
- Hold your tongue: when flamed, do not flame back.

Extra! There is a great post called 21 Creative Ways To Increase Your Facebook Fanbase that is well worth checking. It augments much of what Matthew said in his presentation.

Extra! Extra! Matthew Gain has plenty more words of wisdom on social media, digital communication and integrated communication planning on his eponymously titled blog.

PR + Facebook: Think Strategically

It is a fundamental part of any Facebook communication strategy to leverage the potential viral dimensions of content featured on the Page, said then Weber Shandwick's, but now Edelman's, Matthew Gain at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit. The more it lends itself to viral promotion (i.e. endorsement) the more fans will be attracted to the page (with all of the attendant benefits this can deliver).

This emphasises the need for a well thought out, long term and big picture content strategy. Issues to address include:

- What is the approach to the generation and usage of content across all communication mechanisms, for instance, including the corporate website?
- What communication platform gets the 'exclusives'?
- I have even asked is PR missing the main digital game by focusing on social media and not the corporate website?

Matthew's (@matthewgain) presentation was one of the most insightful of the summit. He also provided Frocomm with considerable value-add for this report after the summit. Because of this, the discussion of his presentation has been broken into two articles. This one focuses on strategic

dimensions of Facebook, whilst the companion piece discusses tactical aspects of the platform for public relations results.

Facebook communication

Matthew said there are fundamental elements you need to get your head around before immersing yourself in the Facebook pool:

- Facebook is a long term bet for your brand. Having a mindset that FB is more a website than a microsite is necessary
- Designate a community manager for the page and create an issue escalation procedure
- Q&A preparation; brainstorm and prepare responses for potential questions; agree who will respond to questions
- Content strategy: think like a media outlet, less like a marketer and pre-plan what content and updates you will be making
- Create a personality for the 'voice' you will be taking and be consistent in the application of that voice.

Facebook Page content can be easily shared. And when linked up to non-Facebook social media platforms, it makes the content even easier to share.

Matthew said he doesn't necessarily think there is a reason why the same content can't, "be leveraged across multiple platforms

including the company website and Facebook, assuming it is relevant for the audience.

"As with any content planning, the first consideration should be the audience. However the limitations of the platform also need to be considered.

"A lengthy whitepaper is unlikely to be received well on Facebook – people are typically not there for that, so keep it short, light and provide a sense of fun."

Facebook or corporate website; or both?

Matthew addressed the question of whether an organisation should have a prioritised digital content platform, corporate website or Facebook.

"I definitely don't think it is one or the other, he claimed. "And I don't think there is any hard and fast rule over which should take priority. In fact I am a big supporter of being everywhere your audience is.

"In terms of prioritisation, the content should be prioritised to the platform and the audience that will receive it best. If you think a certain video will be better received on Facebook than the website, then post it there. If you think it has merit for both, then post it in both places. I don't think people will be surprised to see the same content on a company's Facebook page and also the company's website.



“My advice is to survey your audience and constantly measure the engagement of content being put on all platforms. That way you should get a feel for what works where, when.”

Communication strategy integration: Facebook, one weapon in the arsenal

As with any digital platform, a Facebook Page needs to be integrated with both online (especially) and offline communication mechanisms as part of an holistic approach to PR and marcomms strategy and stakeholder engagement. Unless, of course, part of the strategy's intent is to deliberately 'partition' certain stakeholders from others.

It may well be, for instance, that it is only those who use digital forms of communication that are in the relevant stakeholder/target audience demographic.

Also, it may be a preference not to overload certain stakeholders with a barrage of communication options when research clearly tells us what the most effective mode of communication with this group is:

- It could confuse your stakeholders
- It could alienate and turn them away from any communication about the brand
- It could frustrate them because they do not have easy access to the communication mechanism flagged.

Determining clear, measurable objectives, based on a rigorously thought out rationale, is of course at the base of any strategy. What exactly those objectives should be is the moot point. It is hard enough setting meaningful communication objectives, related to tangible business outcomes,

at the best of times. Setting them for a relatively new medium such as Facebook is even more challenging.

Show me the logic. Show me the impact on reputation/bottom line. Show me why this was the right medium to use, not another. Who has the evidence to talk turkey here, rather than be a turkey talking?

Forming strategic alliances to build off existing communities is a strategic PR 101 approach to cutting corners to reach your potential stakeholders and, importantly, providing additional value to those networking (and the community gov'ners) on Facebook already. (Not least because it will be extremely difficult to get off the ground, otherwise.)

Facebook: digital sadness or communication festival?

It strikes me as being a little sad that human beings want to interact with commercial brands which are, after all, items devoid of emotions or actual personalities. On the other hand is this simply an evolution of the way humans engage with each other and social 'entities' and, as such, is it the role of professional PR pros to go where the opportunities exist to enhance brand/organisation engagement?

“People have always wanted a relationship with brands,” said Matthew. “I don't think people are interacting with brands on Facebook the same way they do with their friends or family, but rather are simply registering they 'like' that brand and want a relationship with that brand.

“By 'liking' a page they are actively opting

into receiving updates from the brand form time to time, may be interested in the opportunity to interact on the brand's Facebook page and are happy that other people will see they are a fan of that brand.

“Ultimately it is an evolution of the way people put brand stickers on their school books, or wear t-shirts representing a certain brand.”

Matthew is also convinced that, “ultimately, there is value for the vast majority of brands or organisations to have a presence on Facebook. I equate it to a website. If you see value in having a website, there is every likelihood you will also see value in having a Facebook page.

“Having said that, there will always be those brands that are more disposed to having a successful presence in Facebook. Those are the brands that have large natural fan followings already. Those types of brands that people support, barrack for, use to represent themselves amongst their friends or aspire to. Some examples may include, Holden, Xbox, AFL or NRL football clubs and aspirational brands like Porsche.”

Extra! There is a great post called 21 Creative Ways To Increase Your Facebook Fanbase that is well worth checking. It augments much of what Matthew said in his presentation.

Extra! Extra! Matthew Gain has plenty more words of wisdom on social media, digital communication and integrated communication planning on his eponymously titled blog.

Go Where The Crowds Are



Nick Holmes a Court, BuzzNumbers



Dan Young, Burson-Marsteller

Crowdsourcing is, alternatively, a 'super charged suggestion box' or a 'cheap way of ripping off ideas'. But however it is described, it can help integrate audiences and business processes, deliver tangible business outcomes and engage with stakeholders in a meaningful way, claimed Dan Young, Director – Digital, Burson-Marsteller at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit.

The power of crowds was an overarching theme of 2010's New Media Summit, which is not surprising given social media's comms cred. Though one sometimes wonders if the ultimate professional communication is an each-way bet:

- Personalisation/niche vs. attempts to reach millions/billions of eyeballs
- Word of mouth (a la real mouths – i.e. old school) vs. Online viral (new school WOM)
- Doing 'it' to keep up with the comms Joneses vs. actually being skilled enough to deliver results.

Nick Holmes a Court, Executive Director of BuzzNumbers, also had crowds on his mind when speaking at the summit. He spoke about analysing online crowds and utilising their power to help drive communication programs forward. Nick (@nickhac) referred to Dunbar's number: "150...the cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships."

The logical corollary to this is that if organisations think they can control large numbers of people based on the assumption that they have a reliable, solid relationship with them – think again!

The logical corollary to this is that if organisations think they can control large numbers of people based on the assumption that they have a reliable, solid relationship with them – think again!

Trust in crowds, organisations and public relations

Nick's presentation was relevant to all topics at the conference as he referred to the trust consumers have in different modes of communication, the utility of digital communication, analysing crowds and making a success of online communication. It will come as no surprise to learn recommendations from people you know are the most influential form of 'advertising', but one stat from Nick's source jumped out:

- Consumer opinions posted online and brand websites generate an equally high degree of trust (70%).

Now figure that one out. It supports the argument, and seems counter to propositions advocated by the likes of Fleischman-Hillard's Napoleon Biggs (at this very summit) that social media has significantly more influence

than corporate websites. David Meerman Scott has argued for the corporate website side of the debate and I have also asked is PR missing the main digital game by focusing too much on social media at the expense of corporate website content?

Crowds, though...can they be trusted? Well, Nick said they have transient memberships and there is a low risk to being a member of an online crowd. So their devotion and loyalty seems a questionable and unreliable quantity.

However, due to the ease with which one can join an online crowd, the many means of discovering this crowd (not to mention the many means through which one can exhibit behaviour in the online environment) and the compounding interest and impact a crowd can have...can organisations afford to miss leveraging the crowd wherever possible? Nick certainly discussed some powerful cases studies to support his assertion that, in many cases, the answer is no.

"But the richest form of engagement is embracing"

But perhaps the punch line is this: the internet is the 2nd most influential source (after TV) of information – and TV is in its sights. That, and his comment that consumers are becoming advocates in the new social media-enabled world, should give organisations a wake up call if they are not already engaged with the digital reality.



The greatest value of crowdsourcing is that it provides an opportunity for an organisation to learn about its stakeholders' preferences and positions on issues

The heart of the crowds

"Engagement between a brand and its customers can take many forms," said Dan Young (@danieljohnyoung). "It can be as simple as talking. It can mean engagement through advocates. And it can relate to support.

"But the richest form of engagement is embracing. In this area, brands are involving all customers. Most commonly, this takes the form of audience integration with business processes." In essence, Dan said, this is crowdsourcing.

Or, more fully: "Crowdsourcing provides opportunities for brands or government agencies to tap into the creativity, experience and wisdom of a mass group of people. It provides a tool for understanding what stakeholders really want."

It provides a fantastic opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of these communities. And by involving the crowd in a meaningful project, brands can engage and embrace these audience groups. So it all has an holistic, integrated and 'full-circle' dimension.

Arguably the greatest value of crowdsourcing is that it provides an

opportunity for an organisation to learn about its stakeholders' preferences and positions on issues, then work in a collaborative manner to adapt its processes, products and behaviour to better meet their needs. Sounds like close to a perfect manifestation of Web 2.0's potential.

Jeff Howe of Wired Magazine, who coined the crowdsourcing term, said it, "forces companies to approach us as potential partners", and that organisational stakeholders, "get to participate meaningfully in the process." It is changing the nature of the basic business model, he argues in this presentation.

Dan persuasively discussed a number of very successful crowdsourcing campaigns by the likes of Ford, Threadless, Dell, New Zealand Police and more. But perhaps the most significant example was The Guardian's use of crowdsourcing to help it evaluate and prioritise a range of documents relevant to British MPs rorting their expense accounts.

- Readers reviewed more than 170,000 expense documents in the first 80 hours
- About 27,000 readers reviewed more than 220,000 pages of submissions
- It created a wealth of exclusive leads and

copy for the paper and, in the process, enriched its relationship with, and advocacy from, its readers to a significant degree.

The crowdsourcing take-away

Dan's final tips on the specifics of crowdsourcing were to bear some key dimensions in mind:

1. Don't ask your stakeholders to do too much – you need to ask them to invest a reasonable amount of time and make it easy for them to participate
2. You'll need to put very clear guidelines in place about how your customers can interact with the crowdsourcing program
3. But you also need to be prepared to lose control – like a good brainstorm. Many wrong answers may eventually lead to the right answer
4. Play to the sense of community but also recognise individual contributions – this will provide people with the incentive to participate and share
5. Finally, and most importantly, don't make the mistake that Kraft made with iSnack 2.0 – allow the community to determine success. This indicates respect for their perspective and insights and will deliver value to your organisation in the long run.

As an added bonus, ICT and PR professional Jan Willem Alphenaar has put together a useful and interesting presentation on crowdsourcing that is well worth checking as well.

D.A.R.E. To Use Video



Ava Lawler, Text100

Online video is in many ways modern day story telling and if you want to tell an effective and compelling yarn, you need to D.A.R.E, Ava Lawler, Global Consultancy Director, Text 100 told Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit. She said that that online video has to be:

- Distinctive – have a unique story to tell
- Authentic – be true to yourself and/or your organisation
- Relevant – ensure audiences will care about your story
- Engage – use engaging storytelling techniques to attract audiences and get them involved through video sharing and responding.

Online video is a powerful tool in a modern communication professional's arsenal but in order to be effective, it requires a specific video strategy incorporating the D.A.R.E guidelines. This should sit alongside an organisation's online, social, paid media, PR and other marketing approaches, Ava said.

One billion reasons to love video

The public's love affair with video keeps growing and growing. YouTube has passed two billion views per day. This soaring popularity is of little surprise – whether for business or pleasure – as video engages people in a way that static text and images cannot. As Ava points out, video is a medium which reaches directly into the hearts, minds and souls of your audience.

There are central themes that have encouraged the uptake of video she says, such as a desire for authenticity and a demand for reality. Then there is of course the evolution of technology. Videos are now easier to shoot, upload, share and view when and where people like, using technology such as mobile phones.

But, as professional communicators are we equipped to communicate directly with audiences? And if not, what do we need to do to create the best video stories for our clients?

See the video below for a great example of an engaging video that successfully went viral.

DIY or professional help for marketing?

Ava explains that a good brief is the crucial first step in the creation of a quality video. One which asks what is the use of video and how does it enable the organisation to deliver the story and meet business objectives? Then you need a story that D.A.R.E.S, an audience and provides a return on investment.

It's never been easier or cheaper to create marketing videos, through using free stock images or even migrating existing TV footage to the web. This means many organisations can now do it themselves internally. Ava advised to firstly look at your 'available resources' and compare this to the 'audience expectations'.

Available resources – check list:

- Video skills – existing, potential or outsourced?
- Onscreen talent – existing, potential or outsourced?
- Budget – for production, distribution and promotion
- Technology – camera, editing software, storage and bandwidth.



Audience expectations – check list:

- What level of video production will they expect?
- What technology will they be viewing from?
- How will they share your story?

Through comparing the two, you will be able to decide whether it is a DIY job or whether the level of sophistication required means using the services of an expert.

You have your video, what next for target audience engagement?

Once you have your video, there are many ways to use it, and many benefits that come from incorporating it in your communication and marketing activity. These include:

1. Loading video on to your website.

There are multiple advantages to using video on your web page. Many people would rather watch a video than read an article. They find video more entertaining and requiring of less effort. Because of the entertainment value people are also likely to spend more time on your website. Having video on your website also looks impressive, shows you are making an effort to market yourself and helps establish a sense of trust, as explained in more detail below. Video can also improve search engine rankings. With its growing

popularity, search engines are beginning to look for video on websites in order to index them in search results.

2. Use video to help sell, use and understand your product.

Only recently have organisations begun to fully understand the power of video as a communication tool that builds customer confidence and increase sales. People feel more secure if they know you are able to show video on your site, because it means you trust your product enough to show it in full multi-dimensional format. And because it means you are investing in your website and seeking to deliver an optimum user experience for your customers. Video makes your site seem more reliable which in turn increases consumer confidence.

3. Use video in online ads.

According to a study by the Online Publishers Association, 80% of all video viewers have watched a video ad online and 52% have taken some sort of action, whether it's checking out a website (31%), searching for more info (22%), going into a store (15%) or making a purchase (16%) Various studies demonstrate the power of video to boost customer interaction, drive sales, encourage viral sharing and build brand awareness. A recent study commissioned by online video specialist

.FOX shows how effective video is at driving, "sustained brand engagement." The study found that:

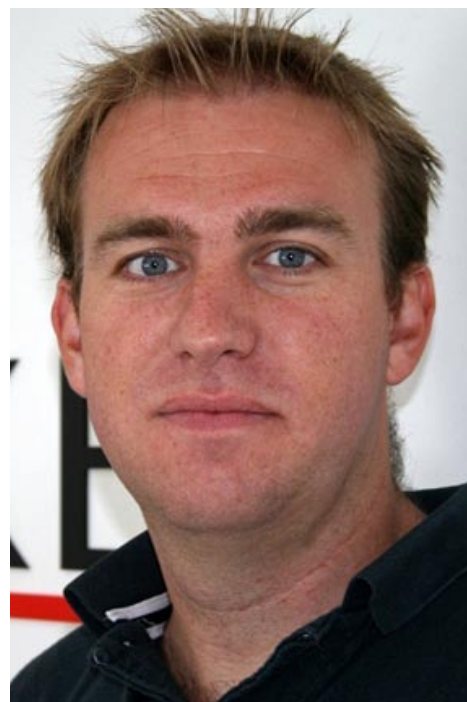
- video is effective in "driving a significant uplift in site visitation and advertiser search queries"
- when evaluating video and display side by side, consumers exposed to video advertising were 28% more likely to visit the brand site and nearly twice as likely to conduct a trademark search
- video is able to generate a more immediate impact in the first five exposures than display ads in terms of increases in site visitation and search queries.

4. Make sure your videos can be viewed on many different devices

If you are going to make a video and you think you will share it on Twitter, it is worth making it mobile phone-friendly seeing as 40 per cent of Twitter users access the service via mobile devices according to a study by Crowd Science last year. Finally, Ava reiterated that video must also be short – less than two minutes is usually best – but 30 seconds is even better. Simplicity is also key, with voiceovers and music kept to a minimum.

But most importantly, have courage and DARE to be different!

Tap Into The App Revolution



Oliver Palmer, TigerSpike

Mobile, hand held devices such as PDAs and iPhones are the future being manifested now for marketing and PR pros. Their use is on the way to swamping that of desk-bound computers and even laptops. For stakeholder engagement to occur effectively, communication professionals must customise their strategies and tactical means of communication to take heed of this development.

This includes the use of language and imagery, as well as the IT/memory dimension of the content, as all factors impact on the rate of engagement that occurs with target audiences.

Oliver Palmer, CEO of TigerSpike, was one of the speakers at Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit. In this interview, he expands on a number of issues relevant to the effective use of hand held devices and the increasingly ubiquitous iPhone apps – can any communication strategy afford to be without one?

1. Why should marketers and PR professionals be interested in iPhone apps? If mobile use fits with their consumer audience then it is a key consideration:

- Apps offer greater engagement than any other mobile execution currently available
- They offer a high degree of functionality, rich content and media
- They combine effective social media integration points as well as time and location-based opportunities that are

the personal nature and 'love affair' that the average consumer has with their iPhone means that cleverly executed mobile campaigns can achieve far greater cut through and brand recall than other advertising mediums.

simply not possible on other platforms. If these components match your audience behaviour and content strategy then they are an ideal vehicle for delivering marketing messages.

2. What is unique about iPhone apps that will help PR and marketing professionals communicate with their target audiences that they can't do through other mechanisms? Again time and location based contextual executions cannot be repeated on any other device. How that functionality fits with your comms strategy and target audience will decide how relevant apps are for you. In addition to this, the personal nature and 'love affair' that the average consumer has with their iPhone means that cleverly

executed mobile campaigns can achieve far greater cut through and brand recall than other advertising mediums.

3. Engagement is somewhat of a mantra to PR and marketing professionals.

Do the iPhone apps up the ante on engagement and how so? Apps offer a higher degree of engagement than many other channels open to PR/Marketing. In research we've done we've found an app over a web offering garners 10 times the level of content consumption, dwell time and overall use because, done right, you can offer a very rich and ultimately engaging experience. The nature of the device, being personal and always with you, is the reason behind applications deepening engagement between the consumer and a brand or product. Applications are seen as a natural extension of the iPhone.

Social mobile helps take social media away from the desktop or wi-fi and allows people to stay in touch with their networks 'out of home' and at any time.



4. Can you outline how iPhone apps can be part of an integrated social media and/or digital marketing communication strategy?

Social mobile helps take social media away from the desktop or wi-fi and allows people to stay in touch with their networks 'out of home' and at any time. There are also opportunities to introduce new elements of social media as we've seen with outfits like Foursquare where game elements and rewards are taken into the 'real world'. Apps can also be used alongside more traditional marcomms strategies, either by combining game elements (Shrek characters in an iPhone game, for example) or by sponsoring applications, such as Smirnoff's sponsorship of the TimeOut London application.

5. Are there ways in which the use of iPhone apps can occur as part of a strategic alliance to benefit a range of organisations/products?

There are a wide variety of sponsorship opportunities for iPhone applications. For example, TigerSpoke developed the Sydney Festival Guide, a handy iPhone guide to the Sydney Festival and this was sponsored by Optus. Optus branding appeared throughout the application and because of the sponsorship the app was able to be offered free to the end user. A similar model has been executed with TimeOut magazine's application in London. TimeOut is the definitive guide to clubs, bars and events in London. The iPhone application

is sponsored by Smirnoff and is again offered free to the end user as a result of the sponsorship. The application has features such as the 'Smirnoff Hot Picks' and allows users to share their location and experiences through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

A recent survey by Morgan Stanley indicates that mobile internet browsing will exceed desktop internet by 2013

6. There is much being written (and plenty of stats about) on the issue of consumers migrating from computers to PDAs/iPhones etc. What impact will this have on the way PR and marketing professionals operate? All it will do is make consumer analysis more important, as well as the 'know how' to capitalise on mobile consumers' behaviour to send them the right message at the right time and in the right way. A recent survey by Morgan Stanley indicates that mobile internet browsing will exceed desktop internet by

2013, so mobile should be a key component of any PR or marketing campaign as this is where the consumers are.

7. How significant is this shift to PDAs/iPhones; is it permanent and where to from here?

It is likely only to grow, as the ability to get what you want from a quick, always-on hand held device is comparable or better than its PC/Desktop/Laptop equivalent than the numbers will grow in favour of mobile and mobile devices. And as per the answer above, mobile browsing will exceed desktop internet browsing in the very near future. New devices like the iPad and netbooks mean that mobile browsing will continue to evolve and marketing and PR practices will have to change to keep up with consumer habits.

8. This shift also means social media is being accessed from PDAs/iPhones. What impact will this have on the social media formats and the way consumers interact with them?

Mobiles have the distinct advantage of 'knowing' more about their users than desktop devices. Using features such as the accelerometer and the GPS, mobiles can determine where I am, track where I have been and know what speed I am travelling at. From a social media perspective this opens up a range of possibilities and different consumer interaction models. The 'check-in' application is being used extensively to extend social media beyond the desktop.

Don't be a PR pro that gets taken to court



Sue Gilchrist, Freehills

Many people consider that online communication platforms such as YouTube and Facebook provide a light-hearted medium which has little or no legal risks or consequences. This, however, is not the case and if you are a communication professional using these social media platforms to promote a product or issue you need to know about consumer protection laws.

If you aren't familiar with the relevant laws and you are not compliant (or where you are familiar with those laws and are still not compliant), you may not only find yourself in hot judicial waters, but you are also risking the integrity of your brand, corporate image and your own individual reputation, not to mention the wrath of the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC), the supervising regulator.

You are also risking the integrity of your brand, corporate image and your own individual reputation

Don't let PR be misleading or deceptive

Sue Gilchrist, Partner, Freehills, told Frocomm's 2010 New Media Summit that all online communication amounts to a representation subject to Section 52 of the Trade Practices Act 1974 (Cth) to the same extent as extent as in traditional media:

A corporation shall not, in trade or

commerce, engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive or is likely to mislead or deceive.

Sue urged communication professionals to remember your (or your client's or employer's) "intention is irrelevant". Although it may seem obvious to you that it is a PR-generated testimonial, or that a blog contains somebody's personal opinion, "not everyone is savvy" and you could be engaging in a misleading or deceptive communication.

Sue told the conference that if a case does proceed to court, there are a few things the court will consider in determining whether there has been misleading or deceptive conduct, including:

- the class of persons likely to be misled
- the standard of intelligence, astuteness or gullibility of this class, otherwise known as the 'the reasonable person test'.

New media platforms and section 52

The court will also take into account other relevant factors, including the nature of new media formats and their potential audiences. For example, platforms such as YouTube are accessible by a very wide range of people which means that the class of persons who must be misled in relation to activities on

It is therefore important to consider the full range of consumers who are likely to come into contact with your new media activities.

such platforms is likely to include people of very different levels of astuteness or gullibility.

Since the court is likely to consider the position of the least astute and most gullible members of this class when determining whether consumers will be or are likely to be misled, activities in new media carry a particular risk of misleading at least some consumers.

It is therefore important to consider the full range of consumers who are likely to come into contact with your new media activities.

However, this is not to say that the emergence of new media has made it more difficult for communication professionals to adhere to section 52. The important thing to remember is that the same consumer protection rules apply to new media as they do to more traditional media. So communication professionals should take the same precautions to avoid misleading consumers in new media.

Indeed, activities on new media platforms



Where a communication is an advertisement, ensure clear disclosure that it is advertising

may be comparable to national newspaper or TVC campaign in terms of their reach, scope and exposure to consumers of varying levels of astuteness.

Although some communication professionals may see section 52 as an obstacle to their creativity, it is important to remember that section 52 plays an important role in protecting consumers by helping to ensure that consumer-facing activities are not misleading or deceptive. Compliance with this principle will also help build consumer trust in a brand or its products. Your creative talent will be engaged even more in ensuring creativity and compliance.

The courts will generally allow a certain amount of “puffery” and creativity in communication designed to sell a product or promote a brand. Section 52 does not prevent communication professionals focussing on the positives of their brand or product.

Section 52 does not prevent communication professionals focussing on the positives of their brand or product.

What section 52 will do, however, is require that communications are balanced and, so, where communication focus so heavily on the positives that it risks misrepresenting the product and/or creating an overall impression that is potentially misleading, those positives

may need to be limited and the negatives specifically disclosed.

What can communication professionals learn from Ian Turpie?

An example of a case which came to the attention of the ACCC was TV personality Ian Turpie’s spruiking of nasal spray for erectile dysfunction for the Advanced Medical Institute (AMI) back in 2004, despite him not suffering from this condition.

In addition to pursuing AMI and Mr Turpie, the ACCC can and will pursue individuals who have knowingly been involved and in this case also pursued the AMI advertising agent that drafted the advertisement. The Court held AMI, Mr Turpie and the advertising agent to have contravened the Trade Practices Act (and awarded costs against both AMI and the agent). The ACCC used this “decision as a warning to advertising agents who play an important role in the preparation and/or publication of advertisements on behalf of their clients.”

Misleading the public can damage your brand and your own reputation

Even if misleading and deceptive conduct does not result in legal action, misleading consumers can damage your brand and your own organisation. An example more specific to new media was the YouTube video of a girl’s romantic quest to find her “man in the jacket”, which turned out to be a company generated video used to promote Witchery’s new men’s line.

This was a campaign that was heavily criticised by the media, which were more than a little annoyed for taking the bait: “If the CEOs of Naked Communications and Witchery think that the media will forgive and

forget being lied to, then the biggest joke is on them.”

The public also didn’t seem that impressed with being fooled by a girl whose apparent search for love took her all the way to The Today Show, the hosts asked her if it was a hoax, which she denied.

Witchery and Naked Communications, the agency responsible, are not the first or last to use social media in this way. But the commentary around the issue focused on the lack of remorse, and indeed arrogance, from Witchery and Naked once the deception came to light and this may have contributed to the campaign being received so negatively.

ACCC vs. Google – a world first

The ACCC is currently taking action in what is a world-first against Google Inc for allegedly deceptive conduct related to sponsored links on its websites. The ACCC says that Google claims to rank search results by relevance, but it actually engages in deceptive conduct by selling off the top positions to commercial partners. This case is currently being played out in the Federal Court.

What you need to know to stay out of trouble

In summary, if you want to achieve effective online communication, it pays to follow these basic rules as outlined by Sue:

- Where a communication is an advertisement, ensure clear disclosure that it is advertising
 - Claims must be based on reliable and current information
 - Take care that the overall impression is not misleading
 - If engaging in comparative advertising: identify the scope and comparison undertake due diligence on the competitors product make sure relevant brands are protected.
- Good luck! (And watch your back...)

The Future of Digital PR



In the rush to become social media experts, and to grab the largest slice of its revenue, responsibility and thought leadership pie, public relations pros are at risk of missing the main digital game: that of providing meaningful, resonant and useful content for corporate websites that is search engine optimised and customised to the needs of organisational stakeholders.

I raise this issue not as an out-and-out expert, but as someone who has observed, for the best part of this year, a swelling tide of – albeit fractured rather than concerted or integrated – commentary from the chattering digital/marketing classes on website content and its importance to communication and engagement between an organisation and its stakeholders.

Are we in living in fear of what is all of a sudden, gulp, dogma that says: do not challenge the deity that is social media!?

Of course, if website content and social media cannot co-exist peaceably, nay, profitably, then what hope is there for professional communicators?

Public relations and providing website content

- Where is the thought leadership and guiding strategic hand in providing direction on what approaches should we take to generating corporate website content?
- Where does public relations fit into the dynamic of service providers involved in providing and delivering content for corporate websites?

Are we in living in fear of what is all of a sudden, gulp, dogma that says: do not challenge the deity that is social media!?

Why is this an important topic?

David Meerman Scott says that corporate (or organisational – I use the terms interchangeably) websites are the new centre of the informational digital universe. He purports that when useful content (for organisational stakeholders) is placed there, and it has reasonable technical/coding SEO backing it up, then that is where those searching the web will go.

This is due to high organically-driven Google rankings, firstly, and secondly, that the content draws them back and they advocate it to others.

But there are others that purport social media is the centre of influence from a digital communication mechanism perspective. And there are yet others who say that the digital manifestation of traditional media, due to both its objectivity and professionalism (I know, try not to laugh), is the most influential mechanism.

Yes, we are getting reductive here. Different issues and different modes of communication need to be focused on, and utilised, for different stakeholder groups, but we are talking in general here.

Anyway, this is just why this corporate website content thing is important. This is not the point of this article.

Why content may indeed be king for public relations(hips)

The internet is, in many cases, the main (or at least an extremely important) means people use to find out information in numerous parts of the world. People will rarely look past the first half a dozen organically ranked search results.

Ipsa facto, getting your preferred website (virtually) top of the list is critically important.

So if you want your organisation to get a chance to influence stakeholders, then it needs to have great SEO.

How do you get great SEO?

1. The current school of thought says the primary influencer is website content
2. This must be supported by very good technical/coding/backend ITish type twiddling
3. Backlinking: getting other sites to link into your organisation's site.

There are also a range of other factors that Jeff Bullas writes eloquently about, such as keyword use, diversity of link sources and trustworthiness of the domain linking to your site.

If you want your organisation to get a chance to influence stakeholders, then it needs to have great SEO.

So, leaving the techie stuff to the backroom IT boys and girls, relevant content that is engaging for organisational stakeholders is a profound, fundamental priority for communication professionals. It needs to be updated regularly, as well, or at least the pages that are being visited do. Google's search spiders get bored if this doesn't happen and then your SEO rankings fall away into search oblivion...

Again I ask, so why hasn't there been a stronger focus on the strategy behind website content design and generation by the public relations profession?

It must be customised to the micro-second attention span of digitally evolved (repurposed!?) human beings.

PR controlling influence... by sharing control

Organisations have an opportunity to get in front of, or at least be in the shooting match, with all the other sources of information out there (especially the digitally diseased ones). Meerman Scott pretty much states that if organisations are smart they can themselves become the new version of the old media – where you go to when you want up-to-date, interesting, compelling information about, and relevant to, an organisation.

You know: thought leadership, value-adding, free content (see Meerman Scott's interview with Seth Godin and Tom Peters: making change..very cool) that is complementary to an organisation and DEFINITELY useful to its stakeholders.

This information needs to take a non-high handed approach. It cannot be condescending or obtuse. It must be customised to the micro-second attention span of digitally evolved (repurposed!?) human beings.

And guess what? Organisations are going to, at some stage, have to acknowledge perspectives (maybe even on themselves...) other than their own. If they can't do that, then how do they expect their stakeholders to take them seriously..take them for real?

Now, if public relations is meant to be the profession that is queen of relationship building, where are we in this? Why are we ignoring this whilst lionising social media? Are websites not the hub and social media the spokes?

PR needs to work harder at website communication

There is no guide, or overarching process, for how one should go about producing the content that goes on corporate websites...from strategic business planning, public relations or marketing perspectives. This is an almost unbelievable 'informational gap' due to the power that has been placed at corporate websites' discretion due to the mind-bending capabilities of search engine optimisation (SEO).

So, this is my attempt to extend what discussions on this topic have occurred. (I haven't found any of real substance along the communication/marketing line, but I am sure they must exist!).

Strategic approaches for corporate website content

Is the purpose of new website content constrained to Google spiders recognising it as new, and relevant to searches, thus ranking the content/web pages higher for organic searches?

Is the purpose of it limited to it being up-to-date, thus more likely to be relevant and useful to the needs of those searching for information? The implication of both these questions is that the content is only waiting for those who come to it – not content that is actually reaching out to those potentially interested in it.

Or is an option to repurpose (or just duplicate) it for other forms of communication like newsletters, e-newsletters, media programs, speaking programs et al, so it can be leveraged through those mediums?

Hmmm, the lines between old-timey broadcast and new age social media sharing approaches are sometimes pretty arbitrary, aren't they?

As for the face-off between social media, corporate websites and digital forms of traditional, hard copy media as to who wins the 'most influential' status, for me organisations have a real opportunity to win this battle.

The face-off between social media, corporate websites and digital 'traditional' media

As for the face-off between social media, corporate websites and digital forms of traditional, hard copy media as to who wins the 'most influential' status, for me organisations have a real opportunity to win this battle. Or at least be a competitive participant. If they are smart. Smart, as in organisations recognise that all opinions

count and all opinions/perspectives should be recognised.

Smart, as in recognise if they invest time and money into this opportunity then they have the opportunity to rank highly in organic searches, then get human browsers to advocate them.

Smart, as in providing content that is above and beyond being purely self-serving (i.e. helpful information that assists human browsers do whatever they want to do that is relevant to the organisation's essential remit or purpose – no need to be too uptight here. People go for helpfulness, not brand handlers freaked out by the fool's gold of brand frigging and other such spurious marketing blather.

As strategic PR counsel Sean Williams pointed out, however, one of the great values of traditional media and social media (in fact, any opinion sources that are not from the organisation in question), is that they are 3rd party opinion:

- Supposedly objective
- Supposedly with nothing to gain
- Supposedly this generates enhanced credibility for the organisation.

Essentially, I agree with this notion in most cases. It's one of the reasons I espouse the forming of strategic alliances as a PR 101 approach.

But, as Sean himself points out, there is increasing doubt regarding the trustworthiness of both social media and traditional media sources. Everyone, it seems, has an axe to grind. If you know the source personally, sure, you know how much to trust and rely upon their perspectives.

But the web is a many-peopled world. Why should you trust people you will never meet and you will probably only have a web-relationship with? Sounds a bit, um, naive, does it not?

People go for helpfulness, not brand handlers freaked out by the fool's gold of brand frigging and other such spurious marketing blather.

Corporate websites should be better at public relations

Organisations, of course, have the most resources to dedicate to their own profile (through marketing and/or public relations, for instance). They certainly should have the greatest motivation and focus on their own profile. And they should have the acumen and intelligence to take the broadest, most strategic and most realistic possible view of their place in their world.

So, really, they have no excuse to be beaten to the punch by other communication mechanisms when it comes to organic searches. Nor do they have any excuse not to form and/or enhance relationships (by both behaviour and communication) with their stakeholders.

Yet, they continue to allow this to occur because of a lack of recognition of the primacy of organic search and, very importantly, because they fail to recognise it is one thing to use technical SEO trickery to get highly ranked. It is quite another to get human browsers to like and advocate you because of the value-adding insights and resources you freely provide.

This is the telling factor in website content success. Is it making stakeholders do what you want them to do? Advocate you? Buy your products? Support your stance?

Resources is a key issue here. Traditional media is losing them. Social media never really had them; and though this is changing to

some extent, we are talking an explosion of a chattering class that is great at accusations and sarcasm, but isn't really setting the world on fire with providing scientifically reliable and assiduously generated proof for its observations, is it?

There may well come a point where the credibility of both sources of information (traditional and social media) lower themselves enough for organisations (through their corporate websites – which can lift themselves up in the credibility status) to be considered at least in the credibility ball park with them.

It is an interesting dialectic. And it is certainly an opportunity for organisations that respect their stakeholders to gain a POD over their competitors that accelerates them along the road to long term, meaningful stakeholder relationships.

This, in turn, must inevitably lead to results such as meeting organisational objectives, increasing profits and minimising regulatory, media and political criticism/scrutiny/interference.

Public relations value from corporate website content

So what is generated from getting positive results from providing corporate website content of value and utility to stakeholders/human browsers?

Authority. Respect. Leadership. And you know, getting the POD from this means a funny little thing called... 'increased sales'.

Website communication: getting the strategy right

The strategy driving what content goes on corporate websites needs to fit into the overarching organisational communication strategy, yet so wide-ranging and large can corporate websites be, that they sometimes seem to occupy their own 'micro-climate' where a unique approach, arguably, needs to be applied.

In this article, with the insight and assistance of a range of communication professionals – digital, SEO (search engine optimisation), marketing, public relations – I outline a number of strategic and tactical elements to consider when utilising websites as an organisational communication mechanism.

Whilst marketing director Lindy Dragstra says, "Enhancing stakeholder engagement will only work if you have interesting and high quality content for your target audience and they know how to find you", I believe that there are

more fundamental strategic communication issues that must be addressed before you begin thinking about content itself.

“Enhancing stakeholder engagement will only work if you have interesting and high quality content for your target audience and they know how to find you”

Strategic dimensions of website communication

One of the most significant strategic questions organisations need to address in the context of website content is how willing is it to engage in a dialogue with its stakeholders?

- Does it value diverse perspectives, even if those perspectives may not be in line with its own?
- Can it tolerate the multi-voiced world of the web or is it wedded to the notion of single, undeniable corporate voice (i.e. The Edifice Attitude)?

This question is especially important in the context of changes that social media has made to the communication and business

“Content should be written to appeal to humans first (robots second) and be packaged in a format that supports SEO.”

operations environment. If engagement is the much heralded behaviour that organisations must display through social media, for instance, how can that same behaviour and recognition of other perspectives not be manifested by social media's natural sibling, websites?

But hey, there is room for multiple approaches and this dynamic is still being worked out.

When thinking about website content, copywriter and web content adviser Charles Cuninghame says you need to ask what is the response that you want from your human browsers, whilst website designer and strategist Heidi Cool says that her premise is that, “The site owner has specific goals and their visitors have certain expectations. Content should

serve each, be written to appeal to humans first (robots second) and be packaged in a format that supports SEO.”

Website and PR consultant Clint Garwood, similar to Heidi, suggests that, “Although the content itself should be truly organic and represent what visitors need and want, your SEO keyword selections need to be research-driven. Knowing which keywords are searched often isn't enough to identify if that keyword will drive traffic to a company website. Your keyword research needs to be able to identify which keywords/phrases offer a competitive opportunity for the website where they will be used.”

Other issues of importance to corporate website strategy include:

- What balance does your overarching communication strategy have between mediated (e.g. media relations) and non-mediated (e.g. direct mail) communication?
- What emphasis do you have on generating databases to allow for ongoing (and outgoing), consistent direct communication?
- Does it have the resources (human, as much as financial) to utilise social media tools to any reasonable level and the necessary attitude to manage them?
- Does your organisation see the issues management benefit of websites?
- How will your organisation determine what content goes on the website?
- Does your organisation have strategic alliances it can leverage through website content that will enhance the organisation's credibility? What about

interviews/testimonials with these alliances?

- What thought leadership platforms does your organisation have and how will you leverage the content generated through these platforms through the varying communication mechanisms at your disposal (e.g. media, speaking engagements, direct communication like e-newsletters, social media)?

Lindy Dragstra raises some valuable points when she says that, “customers and partners are happy to submit content, as this will help them too. It makes your site dynamic and if you make it truly interactive (why not post strings and comments?) there is a reason for people to regularly visit your site.

“But only if the information is of interest to the

audience. People tend to neglect information that is too commercial. They don't want to be bothered by it. But they do want information that inspires them, helps them do their business better, gain new insights etc.”

“customers and partners are happy to submit content, as this will help them too.”

Content for websites: a delicate dialectic

One of the main challenges for professional communicators is determining what stakeholders/target audiences/customers etc want to hear from your organisation. How does this want fit in with your organisation's objectives and producing content that meets the needs of both sides of the fence (when in actual fact, due to the diverse nature of internal and external stakeholders, it is one hell of a tangled fence).

As web strategist Tylar Masters says, you need to, “find out how it feels to be a client”. Clients (or organisational stakeholders) want information on their terms, not on organisational terms. But of course there needs to be a balance and it depends on the nature of the organisation and its overarching communication strategy.

“The audience will feel compelled to reach out to you for more information if you strategically give them the information they need to make a decision about your product/service,” continues Tylar.

Tylar's approach to what she calls the ‘content writing strategy’ starts with a messaging campaign. “My team interviews key partners and employees, as well as audiences and even competition to achieve this strategy. It's what drives conversion.” Critical to this is determining what stakeholders actually want, not what organisations think they want or want them to think. It is a delicate dialectic.

Her ultimate upshot? “Very simply put, effective messaging and content is crucial to conversion.”