

**THE CEO VIEW:**  
**THE IMPACT OF**  
**COMMUNICATIONS**  
**ON CORPORATE CHARACTER**  
**IN A 24x7 DIGITAL WORLD**

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ARTHUR W. PAGE SOCIETY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, the Arthur W. Page Society reported on a series of interviews with CEOs of Fortune 50 companies. The research became part of *The Authentic Enterprise*, a seminal report on the role of communications and its strategic importance to CEOs and corporate reputation. *The CEO View: The Impact of Communications on Corporate Character in a 24x7 Digital World* explores what's new and what remains the same in the opinions of leading CEOs.

### Big Changes

- **Social media is now mature.** CEOs no longer perceive Twitter, the blogosphere or any other social media as emerging technologies, as experimental or as anything less than full-fledged communications channels that must be monitored, measured and interpreted in the same manner as the traditional ones.
- **The news cycle is irrelevant.** CEOs believe that communications success or failure can now happen at any time and in any place across the globe. They say that while long-term planning is still important, orienting communications toward the long term alone is no longer enough. The company's communications strategy—and the chief communications officer—must be primed for instant action.
- **Reputation matters more.** As more information becomes available about brands, products and services via the multiplying digital channels, CEOs feel that attention is increasingly focused on the corporation and the corporate values that stand behind them.

"Everything is more interconnected now, information is disseminated more rapidly, and the timeline is much shorter. When we make a decision, it's going to everyone—not just the intended audience—so you have to be transparent and you have to be authentic."

### The Evolving Role of Communications Executives

- **More CCOs are in the inner circle.** More CCOs report directly to their CEO than they did in 2007. And, more are on their company's executive committee, where most major strategic decisions are made, especially at many larger companies. This definitely does *not* mean that CCOs have left the communications portfolio behind, but rather that, in 2013, the communications portfolio of many companies has become a crucial factor in decision making at every level.
- **Measurement is a key expectation.** CEOs say they now hold CCOs accountable for monitoring, measuring and interpreting the views of a wide circle of stakeholders about a broad

spectrum of brand attributes. They want to know *exactly* which strategic communications initiatives are making *exactly* what impression on *exactly* what stakeholders. While in 2007, CEOs were asking themselves whether this level of scrutiny made sense for their company, now they often demand it.

- **There is only one message.** Given the transparency among stakeholders that social media makes possible, CEOs are clear that tailoring highly segmented messages for different stakeholders is not an option. They prefer a high-level, universal strategy that resonates with *all* stakeholders.

“Our CCO is much more influential now. The job used to be more formulaic—certain messages went to a small number of places, the big mainstream players. Now there’s many more outlets, and correspondingly greater impact.”

### CEO Communications Priorities

- **Get broad and deep input.** CEOs say that the most effective communications strategies are generally those with the largest internal buy-in, and they expect CCOs to work in ever-shifting teams to research, synthesize and execute the full range of approaches for all stakeholders.
- **Make the values transparent.** CEOs believe that they and their people are (usually) making intelligent, thoughtful decisions about their businesses, and they want the good values behind those decisions to shine through to all stakeholders. In short, CEOs are looking for a basic, deep-seated accuracy in their company’s communications—not for the CCO to “put lipstick on a pig.”
- **Check your work.** CEOs want to see concrete results from their communications strategy in the form of hard data on stakeholder impressions of brand attributes, although they acknowledge that best practices for this sort of data collection are still evolving.

“We want to make people love what we do.”

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