



The power of new technology

Young people are, as they always say, the future.

With that in mind it might well be time for your organisation to think about how you use new technologies – which young people in particular take up so quickly and enthusiastically - to help deliver your communication activity.

This is more than just about having a website. No, I am thinking more of texts, blogs, wikis and podcasts – does your company use these as part of its internal communication or as part of its marketing mix? If not, why not?

There may well be very good reasons why not, but before I get onto that maybe it is worth explaining what these various things that sound like something from the cast of Star Wars are and what use they can be put to.

Texts, I hope, we all understand. Blogs are web-based journals that can be easily set up and added to, a bit like an on-line diary. A wiki is a website to which readers can add content, allowing them to register their views on issues and a podcast is simply an audio file that people can download at their convenience.

All well and good. But should your organisation be rushing to embrace these new technologies and what value would they add to your business? It is unlikely after all that your finance director is losing sleep over whether the company has a blog or not.

The simple truth is that all of these new methods of communication have their place and their value in getting your messages across, but as with so many issues, the right answer is to use new technologies where they add value, not just for the sake of being seen to embrace a new culture.

For instance, texts certainly have their uses as part of marketing campaigns, particularly to young people. They also have their dangers. Quick communication is rarely good

communication! Texts have for instance been used totally inappropriately, and probably illegally, in the past to communicate redundancy – not to be recommended, even to young people.

Blogs too certainly have their uses. Some chief executives use them to communicate directly to staff on a regular basis in an informal, chatty style that can compensate for a lack of direct visibility. They also offer project managers the chance to keep multi-disciplinary and cross site teams up-dated on key issues. But again they are no substitute for direct face to face communication and interaction. If the chief executive is seen as a distant and remote figure with no interest in the people on the shop floor, then just having a blog isn't going to address that.

Wikis are more likely to be used in a project environment – allowing employees in a large, multi site organisation to collaborate on policy development or on the delivery of a project. They can also play a powerful role in giving employees the opportunity to comment directly on company policy or to offer ideas on how to crack particular issues. Podcasts are again very useful tools for ensuring that employees have the chance to listen to that key face-to-face briefing they couldn't attend, or to hear the speech you gave to the Chamber of Commerce about the future of your market.

Used carefully and advisedly all of these new technologies can support and add value to your communication activity. But I don't believe that they can be used exclusively to replace more traditional means of communication. People still like to interact directly with each other. And many people will for a long time to come, I believe, still prefer a paper copy of that all important speech that they can stuff in their brief case and read on the train home.

The secret, as with all communication, is to know your audience, understand how they want to interact with you and provide them with a range of ways of hearing from you - and you with a range of ways of listening to them.

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