

Strategic Communications in the Digital Age

Cristina Muntean



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Manage your reputation online regardless of your size and budget: for individuals, start-ups and established companies



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1 Author's note

I will not pretend in this book that I am an expert in digital communications. In fact, you should probably take notice and raise an eyebrow as soon as anyone does. The changes that the Internet, social media and mobile communications triggered in our society for the last decade are so intense, broad and – above all – are happening so fast that very few specialists, if any, can grasp both the overall impact and operational details of our constantly developing new means of communication.

Constant innovation in communication tools – new media, new social platforms, new applications and their upgrades – pour down on us continuously. Their audience is already hyper-fragmented, disoriented and struggling to grasp for meaning in such an overwhelming landscape. Our patterns of consuming information have fundamentally changed. Moreover, we are all communicating at the same time. From individuals eager to launch a blog and share their opinions with their community to global corporations struggling to find new markets – everyone is fighting to make their voice heard in today's digital environment. While we are all looking for clarity and efficiency, we are also all contributing to the increasing noise created by the new communication technologies in our lives.

The Internet that came into being sometime in the early to mid-1980s opened up opportunities undreamed of just a quarter of a century ago. With one click we can now buy products straight from China or contribute financially to support a beginning Ethiopian writer or a Ukrainian singer whose voice touched our heart. We all can do so much more than ever before. Yet we do less, spending more time removing the clutter and trying to find a sense of perspective.

This is why critical distance and strategic thinking is needed in our lives today more than ever before. Without the critical distance we cannot choose the right path for ourselves. Our creative potential – supported and enhanced by new technologies – can get easily overwhelmed by the burden of understanding why, what, with whom, when, where and how to communicate. It is my hope that this e-book will be a guide towards purposeful communication and an instrument of support that will lift you up and help you to see your goals and your path with bigger clarity. Regardless of our size – individuals, groups, companies or nations – we harbor a seed of potential that we have a duty to nourish, cultivate and share with the world. Communication is one of the best ways to tackle and unleash such potential. Hopefully this e-book will be one more brick on your road towards your destiny.

*Cristina Muntean
Prague, April 2014*

2 Why digital communication?

Do you remember the famous scene from the 2000 British-French romance movie *Chocolat*, when Vianne Rocher, who has just established herself in the secluded French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes and opened her exquisite chocolate shop, is trying to attract her first customers?

Conscious that she is under close surveillance from the village's moral authorities who consider chocolate a mortal sin that will certainly estrange people from God, Vianne treads carefully. She observes her new community and approaches each person carefully, sensitively yet smartly. Her main tools are observation, a deep understanding of human nature and common sense. In the end, as we know, she manages to conquer people's hearts and remains in the village where she finds a new home for her and her daughter.



Chocolat (2/12) Movie CLIP - Something Special (2000) HD

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALImNM6jWZw>

Prior to the launch of the Internet in the mid-80s, our communication was less driven by technology and more by common sense. A small shop owner would carefully observe and listen to the customers who would visit her shop and would talk to them personally. If she wanted to use some “direct marketing” she would distribute a handful of leaflets written in a way customers would understand. She would use the same words as the clients and address the same problems the community would be dealing with. In fact, she would be a part of the community. For the small shop owner, being able to enjoy this close connection with her target audience was not a matter of return on investment (ROI): it was a matter of life or death.

A quarter of a century later, such a common-sense driven approach still pays off. Clay Morgan of the [Spin Sucks](#) professional communications blog notes in [a post](#) from May 7, 2014: *“There’s a mom and pop pizza place near my house. Family business. Owned by Nick. Signs of success are everywhere. He and his wife drive nice cars and live in a nice neighborhood. Their son goes to private school. The business is always packed and it is the best pizza I’ve ever put in my mouth. What is his web marketing plan? I don’t think there is one. He does occasionally do a Groupon or Deal Chicken, he has a Facebook page he updates occasionally, and they do have a website. But that’s about it. Where’s the web marketing they need? I mean, without it you are going to die, right? As Nick told me once about his Facebook page, it’s a nice thing and they like putting pictures on it, but he’s too busy making pizzas to worry about “likes.””*

So, if old-school direct communication is still so important today, why should we care about digital communications?

Digital communication matters. For the last three decades, the Internet and social media added an extra-layer of opportunities and risks to our communication. Some 25 years ago, if someone had a problem with your pizza, he would tell it to your face or complain to a handful of friends. Today, he will most probably complain about your service on your Facebook page, with thousands of people seeing the message straight away. In the era of smart phones, tablets and other digital gadgets, customers can and will take pictures and videos of your products / services / reactions and share them instantly with the world. Thanks to that, your problems now leave a permanent digital footprint. That can take you out of business before you even realize what’s going on.

Digital communication matters because new communication technologies have empowered our customers, employers, employees, investors and the wider community to levels never known before. In the era of traditional print, radio and TV mass communication you could get your message to you audience in two ways: buy some advertising or gain coverage thanks to clever media relations. Less than 25 years ago, the only reaction an unsatisfied viewer might have had was to accept your message or to complain about it and eventually send an unhappy letter to the newsroom. The power of such a reaction was limited to the impact of an individual. Today, however, top-down communication doesn’t work anymore: the Internet and social media have given our clients a voice and they are not hesitating to use it. Today, it is not about top-down communication anymore: I speak and you listen. Today, everything is a mutual, powerful, engaging digital conversation. Like in real life, you will get from this conversation what you put into it. In the era of the Internet and social media you reap what you sow.

Given the tremendous speed of change of social media features this e-book won't take you through technical details on how to set up particular networks. It will rather try to support you to think about digital communications strategically: remove your fear from the digital environment, understand its role in your life, connect your digital activities to your real-life goals and turn communication into something that works for you rather than against you.

It doesn't matter if you're an individual, a small enterprise or an established company: the rules of digital communication apply to all of us. It is my hope that everyone can find in the lines below something for themselves, something that will help you to see the digital world in a different, beneficial and more strategic perspective.

Welcome to the digital world!

3 Who are you and what do you want?

It doesn't matter if you are a fresh graduate looking for your first job, a career-driven professional looking for your next move, a start-up entrepreneur or an established company: digital communication is already part of your life.

Most probably you own a mobile phone, a notebook, a tablet or another smart gadget. You communicate with the world, collect data and make decisions based on information brought to you by digital devices: your smart phone, computer, tablet, even your smart TV. The only question is to what extent you are using the tremendous opportunities offered by today's digital communications world to support your potential, enhance your development and achieve your dreams. Is this new digital reality more of a noisy burden for you rather than a powerful engine for your personal and professional growth? And, if that's the case, what can you do about it?

In order to answer this, we first need to answer one more important question – my favorite when it comes to individual and group coaching: *who are you and what do you want?*

A key process when you start thinking about how to communicate strategically is to give yourself some time, sit down and answer this simple question: *who are you, at this moment in your life, and what exactly do you want?*

Let's do this small “profiling” exercise together:

- **What is your age?**
 - 15–25
 - 25–35
 - 35–45
 - 45–60
 - 60+

- **What is your educational level?**
 - Are you about to graduate school?
 - Is your current education sufficient to help you obtain the type of work that you desire?
If not, what's missing?
 - Are you considering a Master in Business Administration (MBA) program to enhance your professional skills?

- Are you looking for complementary training that would enhance your performance at work (specific expertise, skill training, coaching and mentoring techniques etc)? If yes, what type of training?
- Are you looking for opportunities of personal development and growth in fields that are not necessarily related to your current job? If yes, what exactly are these fields and how can you leverage your new knowledge to gain more from life?
- **What is your level of employment?**
 - Are you looking for a first job?
 - Are you already employed? Are you satisfied at your current work?
 - Would you like to advance in your career within your company? How do you plan to achieve that?
 - Are you looking for a new professional challenge outside your company?
 - Do you dream of launching your own business?
 - Have you already launched your own business? Is it growing?
 - Would you consider your business an established company? What role does communication play in your life with your stakeholders: clients, employees, investors – at this point?



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Let's try answering a few more questions:

- **What are your values?** If you had a fear of heights, what would be those things that would make you cross a suspended bridge between two mountain peaks? If you are afraid of fire, what would be those things for which you would be willing to enter a burning building?
 - **Tip: Take some time to write down your values.** First, write them as they come, without giving them too much thought. Then look at them again. Attach numbers to them in the order of their priority. Create a hierarchy of your values. Now look at each of them and wonder: am I experiencing this value at this moment in my life? If not, what's missing? What can I do to actually experience / bring back this value into my life? Now ask yourself: how can better communication help me to experience my main values? How can I enhance the experience of my core values thanks to communications?

- **Can you identify all the roles that you are playing in your life?** Which ones of these roles bring you joy, which ones you fulfill only because you have to, and which ones you could leave behind without too much loss? Ask yourself: how can I use communication to unburden and unload some of the roles I don't need to fulfill anymore and experience more joy from fulfilling the roles that I actually want to retain in my life?
- **Can you point at one specific goal that you'd like to achieve within the next 12 months in the following areas:**
 - Finance and material security
 - Career
 - Relationships
 - Health
 - Education and personal development
 - Hobbies
 - Contribution to your community?
- **Now ask yourself again: How can more / better / well thought-through communications help me in achieving each and every one of these goals?**

These questions are as valuable for individuals as for companies. At the end companies are – or should be – nothing but a collection of individuals driven by similar values looking in the same direction.

Yet it might seem easier to identify the answer to the question *Who are you and what do you want* for an individual rather than for a company. This is why, in order to support larger organizations to identify the ground for their strategic communications, I developed a service called the **Lean PR Clinic**. In essence the **Lean PR Clinic** is a one or two-day workshop when we sit down with top organization representatives and communications people and we answer these questions:

- What is your vision?
- What are your core values?
- What are your roles?
- What are your particular goals for short term, mid-term and long-term?
- How can strategic communication help you in achieving them?

Who are you and what do you want? Do not underestimate the power of answering this key question before moving any further in reading this e-book. After all, if you don't know where you are going, you will never know when you've got there.



Source: Facebook discussion group Earth: We Are One.

4 Strategic communications for individuals – personal image management

Strategic communications is not the first thing to come to your mind when you're just about to graduate or you're an employee drowning in your tasks at work. However, *the main argument of this chapter is that, in order to live the life that you deserve and to achieve your goals and life potential, you need to be aware of the importance of communication and the role that it can play to help you navigate life's challenges on your way to your purpose.*

For the sake of coherence I will stick with digital communications and not delve into interpersonal communication and more personal development matters. What this chapter intends to do is to provide you with a few instruments to take charge of your communication and to consciously and powerfully raise the value of your reputation in the digital world.

Remember: your digital footprint IS your virtual identity. It is out there already, whether you want it or not. The only question is: to what extent does it serve and help you in achieving your purpose? And, if it is not serving you, that what can you do about it?



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4.1 Your digital profile

Have you ever done an online search for your name? If you haven't, go on and do it right now.

Use several search engines – from Google to Yahoo and maybe some specific local search engines. Notice what you find, from text to pictures and videos.

Is there anything surprising you? Is the outcome of your search something you'd like the world to see? Go back to your list of goals: is the outcome of your search something that is complementary and supportive in relation to what you want?

Box: Surprise, surprise

When I launched my company Media Education CEE in May 2010 I was sure my digital reputation was not so bad. After all, I was a reputable financial reporter with years of business coverage for the most prestigious Czech English-language business magazine behind. My new company focused on media and communications advisory, training and coaching, so I needed to make sure that whatever peopled found related to it and to my name was in line with my goal: to present myself as a successful media trainer.

Not little was my surprise when I did a Google search for my name. Cristina Muntean is not a common name in the Czech Republic where I live and where most female names end up in a specific format: -ová. However, my name is actually quite common in Romania where I come from. Therefore, my first observation was that I had some pretty healthy competition when it came to my name, both in terms of text links and names of fellow accounts on social media. But my biggest surprise came from the video section on YouTube.

When searching for my name, the first search outcome that popped up on YouTube was a lady with a herd of sheep in the background, singing some popular Romanian folk song. For an economic journalist aiming to make a career in the highly visual, highly demanding premium-business media training world, this was a wake-up call. Till today, professional video communication remains one of the top priorities of my business.

Now try to look at the same information with the eyes of somebody else:

- A friend
- A recruiter
- Your boss
- A potential client.

When you look at the outcome of your search with the eyes of somebody else, you might easily notice whether the information lying out there about you acts in your benefit or not.

And what if there is no information at all? What if you want it that way?

This is a very common question that I receive during the first meeting with clients: *Do I really have to be out there in the digital world in the first place? It's time-consuming and tiring and I want to live a real life, not some cheap virtual surrogate. Isn't there a way to avoid all this ever-too-complex, invasive, noisy digital environment and just go on with my life, doing things like I've always done them before?*

Unfortunately, the answer is: no. Being able to stay out of the digital mainstream or to consciously avoid the digital world today is an illusion. With more and more systems getting interconnected, we leave a digital footprint not only through our personal efforts, but also through the intervention of others. Letting the digital world create an image for you might create a portrait that might not necessarily be to your liking, let alone to support you in achieving your goals. Pretending that the digital world does not exist leaves room for somebody else to use your digital room and fill it with something irrelevant or potentially harmful. Thus, by taking no action you are, in fact, considerably narrowing down your options for using the power of the digital world to your own advantage.

4.2 What to do about it?

4.2.1 LinkedIn

First things first. You don't need to launch a professional website in order to start managing your virtual identity – well, not yet anyway. One of the most powerful, easier, time-affordable and strategic digital communications tools for individuals – graduates, employees and top management – is LinkedIn.

Entire books have been written about [LinkedIn](#) – the social network for professional contacts – so I will not delve too much on the network technical background and history.

Suffice to say that:

- LinkedIn was founded in 2002, launched in May 2003 and publicly listed on the New York Stock Exchange in May 2011
- As of February 6, 2014, it had **more than 277 million contacts in 200 countries**
- At the beginning of 2014 LinkedIn was available in 20 languages, including Czech and Romanian
- According to a LinkedIn survey from January 2013, 65% of journalists use LinkedIn to gain background information on their sources.

In essence, this is what LinkedIn is: ***a network of professional contacts where you share the best of your professional profile with a potential employer, business contact, client or the media.*** In fact, anyone potentially interested in your professional skills can gain access to you thanks to your LinkedIn profile.

Here are a few reasons why you should consider being on LinkedIn:

- LinkedIn cooperates closely with most important search engines such as Google, thus your chances of popping up when someone is looking for you online are increasing
- Thanks to this visibility mechanism you have a one-and-only chance to make a good first impression online. In effect, thanks to a well-groomed LinkedIn profile your virtual identity can and will attract people towards you in your real life as well.
- If you have complete information on LinkedIn, you can download your CV straight from your profile anytime you need it. Thus you can stop worrying about updating your offline profile constantly.
- You can keep in touch with your former classmates and colleagues and stay informed on their career development.
- You can leverage your networking activities by adding the new people that you meet to your LinkedIn profile and staying in touch with them thanks to your status updates.
- You can cultivate a solid network of contacts that can prove priceless when you need to make a change in your life.
- You can feature positive recommendations from your former professors, employers and colleagues who can speak well about your work and thus add value and trustworthiness to your profile.
- You can track who visited your profile and thus get in touch with them almost instantly.
- You can be part of numerous interest groups, gain know-how and reach out to people who are often important decision-makers in your community.
- If you consider starting your own business, LinkedIn can prove an invaluable tool for networking, personalized business development and strategic sales.

Box: My Odyssey

MyOdyssey is a mentoring program for women with high leadership potential launched by the **Vodafone Czech Republic** in the spring of 2011. As I had just started my business, I was thrilled by its potential. I applied and, to my satisfaction, I was accepted in the first mentoring cohort. In time *My Odyssey* became a leading source of networking, mutual support and personal development for talented business women in the Czech Republic.

The mentoring program opens once a year; in 2014, more than 50 mentors – top business people, company CEOs and entrepreneurs – were ready to accept their newly assigned mentees. Given the high profile of the mentors, the selection process of the mentees was a challenging responsibility. As an internal source noted: *“We were quite reluctant in taking applications from women who didn’t have a LinkedIn profile. If they didn’t even bother to give a few hours and take care of their image online, what would make us think that they would behave otherwise and value our mentor’s time and investment into their development? Of course, being on LinkedIn wasn’t the sole selection criterion, but it was an important one, for it spoke about the importance that the future leader gave to her personal image management.”*

Having a well-groomed profile on LinkedIn might help you in situations when you might expect it the least. On the other side, a profile featuring untruthful information or the lack of a profile for the matter may also take away chances from you. You don’t have to be on LinkedIn; it’s strategic to be on LinkedIn. Whatever choice you make, make sure it yours and it’s a conscious one.

4.2.1.1 Basic information

One of the first things you need to do once you decide to join LinkedIn and set up your profile is to fill in your personal information such as education, professional background and skills.

As always in the digital arena, make sure your information is complete, accurate and trustworthy. There is nothing worse than going for a job interview and hearing the recruiter saying: *“I noticed you have this particular information on LinkedIn so I just wanted to double-check it and I heard from your school / former employer that what you write is a lie.”*

Usually there is only one phone call between you and the truth. As Warren Buffett said: *“It takes decades to build a solid reputation and just a few minutes to ruin it. If you think like that, you’ll do things differently.”*

The minimum of information you should consider placing on your LinkedIn profile is:

- Your professional picture
- Accurate contact information (phone, email, eventual blog or website)
- A summary of your profile, achievements and goals
- Accurate educational background
- Accurate professional background
- Set of skills that you possess.

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4.2.1.2 Common mistakes on LinkedIn

Here are some of the most common mistakes people make on LinkedIn:

- **Inadequate photography.** Your picture is meant to help people identify you from a larger number of potential individuals with a similar name. At the same time, no one is interested how you look in a bath suit or with your dog on the beach – such pictures belong elsewhere rather than on your professional profile.
- **Missing contact information.** You just managed to attract someone's attention, they invited you to join their network, they would like to reach out to you directly and there is no contact information on your profile. This issue can be solved by sending you a direct message via LinkedIn once the person is in your contact network; however, if you want people to be able to reach out to you faster, it is in your best interest to share the contacts that you use for your professional endeavors.
- **Missing summary.** The personality summary that LinkedIn provides allows people to describe their achievements, strengths and vision. It is at the same time a powerful collection of key words that you'd like to be identified with your name. Use it wisely.
- **Confusing information.** When you add two activities conducted during the same period of time, make sure it is clear how they relate to each other. Otherwise it may leave the visitor wondering about the truthfulness of your two overlapping activities.
- **Gaps.** Even if you took a longer sabbatical don't hesitate to find an elegant form to express what you've been up to in the missing timeframe. Leaving people room to second-guess what happened to you in that period of time may take them to conclusions that might not be necessarily in your best interest.

4.2.1.3 Privacy on LinkedIn

LinkedIn provides users with a complex degree of privacy settings. Inform yourself on their structure and consider them very carefully before deciding for the best combination to protect your profile.

Some LinkedIn privacy options you might want to consider:

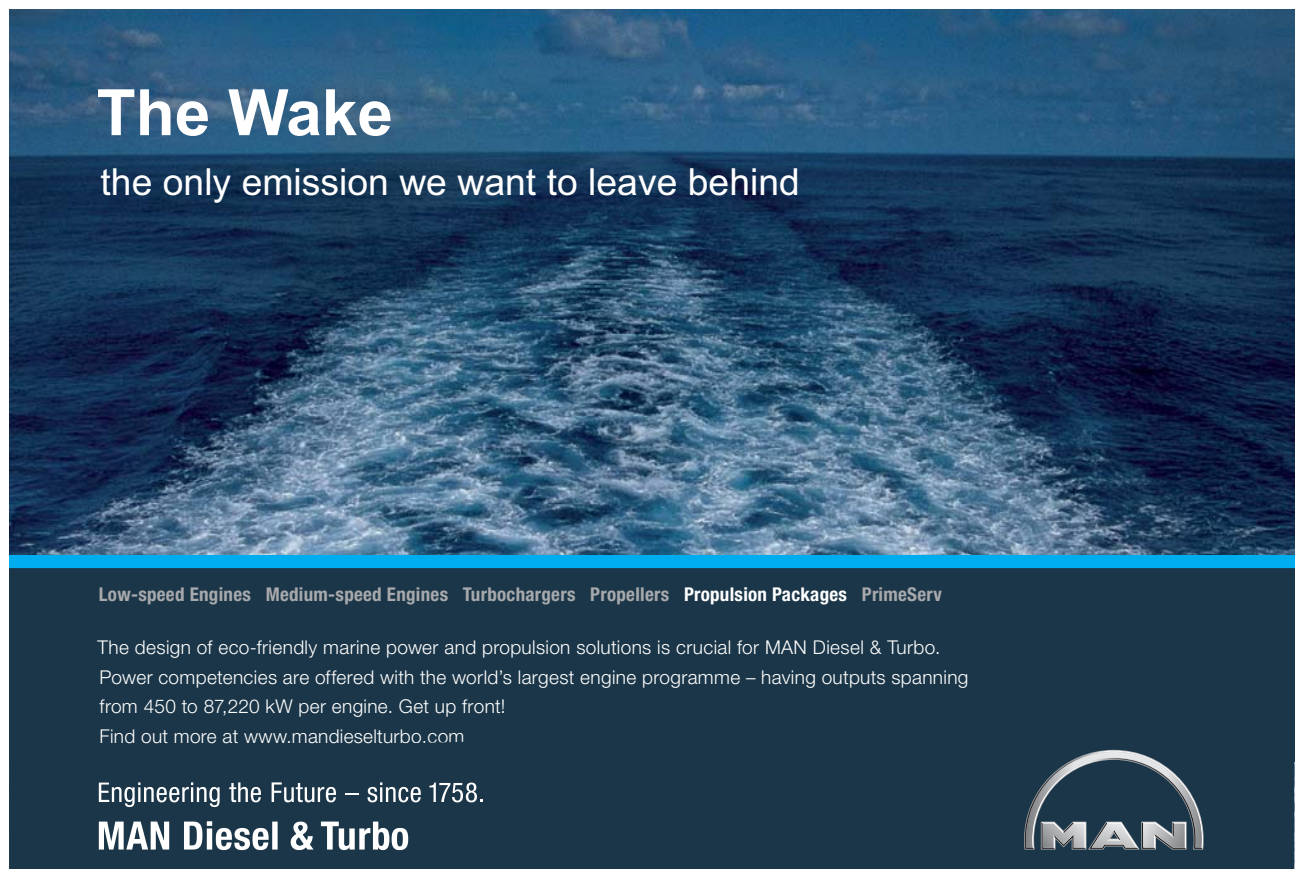
- Allowing your new contacts to see only the contacts that you have in common and not your entire network (it prevents the risk of a new contact abusing people from your established network)
- Looking at someone's profile anonymously (it may come handy when you want to scan your competition or a potential new job or candidate)
- Allowing only a certain group of people to see your updates (it may come handy when you're looking for a new job and you wouldn't like your current employer to know your steps).

4.2.1.4 Status updates and know-how sharing

One of the most indicated tools to keep your LinkedIn profile fresh and alive is to share various articles and professional information in your status updates. Choose the information that you are share wisely and in line with your network's professional interest. Don't forget to check your profile analytics on the main page to see how many people viewed a certain post: this will give you valuable information about what people are interested in and read and what they appreciate less. Integrate the analytics into your behavior: share more of what people do read and less of what they don't necessarily care about.

4.2.1.5 Contact request etiquette

LinkedIn gives you the possibility of sending an automatic message inviting someone to join your network. However, my experience shows that it is highly indicated to take a few moments and drop a personalized message to a potential new contact in order to convince the person of your interest. Such etiquette sensitivity is increasing with the level of seniority of the other person: the more senior the person you are addressing, the higher it is recommended that you address them personally and not via the LinkedIn automatic message.




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4.2.1.6 Contact management

It is easy to have a good overview of who is a part of your network when you only have a few dozens of contacts in it. However, focus becomes harder when you start acquiring hundreds if not thousands of professional contacts. This is why it is highly recommended that you create tailor-made tags that you attach to your new contacts from the very beginning so you can sort through your contacts easier in the future. Such tags may be: Classmate, Former Colleagues, HR Manager, Recruiter, Potential client and so on.

4.2.1.7 Recommendations management

One of the items that LinkedIn users most appreciate is the possibility of giving and receiving professional recommendations that stay online and speak about your skills to your entire network. For example, if someone hires me to conduct media training for their company and they are highly satisfied with my work, they might want to recommend me on LinkedIn. If they do so, all my other contacts will instantly see the positive recommendation giving praise to my services. This may land you a new job or me a new deal: you never know who else might be just out there looking for a good media trainer.

However, do not expect happy customers to be forthcoming about giving you recommendations online. Dare to address them directly and kindly ask them for such referrals. People who might recommend you include a professor who valued your intelligence at school, a former employer, a client or a business partner. To reach your goals, make sure that most of your recommendations come from people whose words weight something in your community.

Most common mistakes in LinkedIn recommendation management:

- **Quid-pro-quo:** when someone is giving you a recommendation, don't feel obliged to concoct a recommendation back immediately. By the contrary, it is indicated that you give it some time until you recommend the other person as well.
- **Hot air:** you should only recommend people whose work you are familiar with and you can truthfully praise. If not, you should state openly that you are a friend recommending the given person based on your common values and background rather than on a client-supplier relationship.
- **Syrupy praise:** of course you are tempted to say very good things when you are asked to recommend someone. However, make sure your words come across as genuine so people reading your recommendation can actually believe them.
- **Grammar mistakes:** writing a recommendation full of grammar or spelling mistakes does a counter-favor both to you and to the person you are recommending. Most often people will be too embarrassed to ask you to recall your message and they might delete it or run it anyway. It is in the best interest of both of you to try to do a grammar and spell check before sending someone your recommendation.

4.2.1.8 Skill management

In an attempt to activate its users mainly after being publicly listed in 2011, LinkedIn has been doing a series of changes on people's skills management; more such technical fine-tuning can be expected in the future. Currently – as of May 8, 2014 – a skill endorsement is generally defined as a means of confirming someone's stated skill by anyone in its network.

One of the questions I am often receiving during training is the value of endorsements. Well, as in the case of recommendations, it depends on who generates the endorsement. If you have 10 endorsements from friends who might not be necessarily apt in qualifying your skills, the endorsement might not be as relevant as when the endorsement comes from someone professional who can truly judge your competency. For example, in my case an endorsement from a top journalist saying that I am good at media relations is much more valuable than an endorsement from a good friend in grammar school telling the world the same thing.

4.2.1.9 Group management

Group management allows you not only to share your topics of interest with other members of the group – it allows you to have access to other group members' know-how and to reach out to them directly.

Most common mistakes of group participation on LinkedIn:

- **Posting self-promoting statements instead of intriguing topics for real discussion.** By doing this you are basically sending a message to the group owner that you welcome his effort of creating a community that you're all too ready to exploit for your own benefit.
- **Personal attacks.** Someone might have done something to you. However, taking it online and washing your dirty laundry in front of the whole group is saying more about you than about the other person.
- **Profanities.** It doesn't matter how powerful the emotions that the topic under discussion is bringing up, profanities are usually little accepted on a professional communications platform.

4.2.1.10 Measuring the effectiveness of your LinkedIn presence

LinkedIn offers some pretty valuable tools to measure the value and impact of your digital activities: for example the overall number of people in your network, the number of people who saw a certain post, the number of people in your network coming from a certain geographic area and so on. Metrics in the digital world are more powerful today than ever before – check this [specialized blog on social media metrics](#) for more information. Make sure that you match the goal of your measurement activities with your initial financial, professional and personal goals: measurement is only valuable when it's telling you how far you are from your target and when you've already gotten there.

4.2.1.11 LinkedIn company profiles: professional digital ambassadors

In an attempt to maximize revenues from its platform LinkedIn has been doing numerous changes in the way companies handle their digital profiles. One of the most important things for companies remains the fact that a corporate LinkedIn profile can be a powerful meeting point for the company's employees, clients, investors and potential future employees and business partners.

This is why it is important to run a powerful and engaging corporate page driven by news relevant and suitable for followers. The more engaging your content, the more people will share it in their own networks and thus become your corporate ambassadors. The more people share your corporate news, the more people outside your direct network you reach out to. This is digital communication at its best: it can bring you new talent, new customers and new business partners on a silver platter. If done strategically.

4.2.2 Blogging

One you've taken care of how you make a first impression in the digital world and you're now exploiting the potential of LinkedIn for professional visibility and community management, time has come for you to share something of your own with your audience.

The advertisement features a central graphic on the left consisting of a circular arrangement of four arrows pointing clockwise, with three stylized human figures and several gears in the center. To the right of this graphic, the text 'UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT' is written in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below this, the dates 'OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018' and the location 'DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM' are displayed in smaller blue capital letters. At the bottom of the ad, there is a silhouette of an Amsterdam cityscape including a windmill, a bridge, and various buildings. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is visible. A hand cursor icon is positioned over the bottom right corner of the ad, pointing towards a green oval button.

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Digital content management: creating and sharing engaging content in the digital arena – is actually one of the hottest issues today. The more powerful, relevant and interactive content you can publish, the higher the value of your personal brand. You can be easily traceable and people can become familiar with your know-how and opinions in just a matter of clicks.

Why you should consider blogging:

- To communicate with a certain community (family, friends, neighborhood, specific interest or business community)
- To inform, cultivate and engage in a dialogue with your community
- To share your creative endeavors (writers' blogs)
- To share your know-how (experts' blogs)
- To get on the radar of decision-makers in your community: media, politicians and other formal and informal decision-makers
- To build engagement with a certain cause
- To attract funding: charity initiatives.

Above all, blogging is about establishing your own presence online and thus raising the chances of someone finding you when they're looking for someone with a particular set of skills / know-how / expertise.

4.2.2.1 Most common mistakes in blogging

Does running a regular blog feel overwhelming? It can if communication isn't your true passion or core activity. So, what can you do to get the best out of your blogging activities and minimize risks of burning out?

Most common mistakes in blogging:

- **Choice of the wrong platform.** You have been spending years to build a community and now the platform you've been using to blog is closing down without warning, washing all your efforts away. This is a risk more present with small local platforms than with global open-source ones; however, never underestimate choosing the right blogging platform for yourself strategically.
- **Confusing set-ups.** Posts that are visible only to a certain audience, only from time to time or not at all; lack of possibility to comment on your updates or sharing your posts – all these issues tend to frustrate the reader rather than support and build your audience.
- **Lack of focus.** It is your blog, so you can do whatever you want with it. However, writing about pretty much everything that crosses your mind anytime you feel like it is rather confusing to your audience. Remember: even best-selling authors have a recurrent theme in their posts and they stick to it for the sake of clarity and audience engagement.

- **Lack of regularity.** Once people get used to something, they'd like to receive it regularly. You're basically creating a need. If you fail to meet that need on a constant basis, you might develop a community of frustrated readers. Make sure you can stand the challenge of posting regularly prior to launching your blog.
- **Venting.** You might feel very strongly about a topic or a person at a certain point. However, your blog isn't your battlefield and your community didn't necessarily join you to assist your digital crusades. Remember that what is written stays written and whatever you place online leaves a permanent digital footprint.
- **Lack of comment management.** People comment on your blog because they try to engage in a (positive or negative) conversation with you. After all, building community and cultivating your audience is one of the main goals of blogging. Constantly ignoring people's reactions to your posts show that your focus is more on top-down communications than on your community's real needs. In time, people will also learn to care more about themselves and leave your blog.

4.2.2.2 How to choose your content management system (CMS)

Some of the most common global blogging platforms as of May 2014 are:

- WordPress
- Tumblr
- Blogger
- Quora
- Google+
- Facebook Notes
- Typepad
- Ghost
- Squarespace
- LinkedIn Influencers (it opened up to the large public in February 2014) etc.

While on established communication markets like the US blogging is usually taking place on one of these wide-open global platforms, things might look differently on smaller more specific markets.

BOX: Blogging in the Czech Republic

Blogging in the Czech Republic is specific in its own way. As numerous companies struggle still to find their ideal content management system (CMS) provider, numerous personalities chose a shortcut to their audiences: running permanent blogs on the websites of mainstream media. Websites of the most important local dailies such as www.idnes.cz, www.ihned.cz and www.aktualne.cz have a various number of bloggers who feed (mostly opinion) content to the site. In exchange, the already established medium provides the blogger with visibility, prestige, comfort and a certain sense of security. However, such cooperation works only as long as the blogger understands the need to stick to a certain theme that is in line with the interest of the newspaper audience AND his posts are highly readable. Also, if the medium decides to close down the blog, there isn't much you can do about it and your blogging history may easily get lost.

Choose your blogging platform wisely. There are numerous authors who specialize in blogging advice – [Jon Morrow](#) for example is one of them. Make sure you do a proper online research on how to approach your blogging endeavors prior to launching your own blog.

4.2.2.3 Blog set-up

Prior to launching your blog, here are a few things you might want to consider:

- **Choose a powerful / relevant name.** You can either choose to name your blog after yourself – which will make it easier to find and help support the value of your personal brand – or you can choose to name it after a topic of interest that you can identify with – which will point at your know-how in that particular field.
- **Settings.** Give yourself time to explore, understand and adjust your blog's settings as well as you can in order for the blog to function and serve you at its best.
- **Content management and writing.** Contribute to your blog every time you have something to say. Check below the section *Conscious content management: planning* to learn a few simple principles of planning your online blogging content.
- **Writing and grammar check-up.** Do give yourself some time to check your grammar and spelling. If you are writing in a second language, ask the help of a native speaker to go through your posting before you publish them to make sure no embarrassing items pop up back unexpectedly.

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Box: Brand Journalism, aka BJ_CEE

In 2011 I was preparing to organize the first conference on the topic of Brand Journalism in Central and Eastern Europe. Eager to share my news on Twitter, I decided to launch a new account. Yet, constrained by the number of characters Twitter allows in an account name – BrandJournalismCEE would simply not fit in – I decided to go for a shorter form – BJ_CEE. It was later that I discovered that, for a native English speaker the BJ letters have a totally different connotation: *blow job*. Yup. I blushed too when I figured that out. Yet it was too late and my community was already created. Now I can only pray my readers have an open mind and an endless understanding for the unwanted sins of non-native speakers.

4.2.3.1 Conscious content management: planning

One of the most important aspects that will support you in your effort to write regularly and thus cultivate your community around a topic of your interest is your content management planning. Give yourself an hour or two to sit down and draw your blog content management plan.

How to approach your blog content planning:

- Plan long term (a year), mid-term (a season / quarter) and short term (a month or week, depending on your writing regularity)
- **Pin down the major events that you know will happen in the long term framework:**
 - Trips you know you will take (for a travel blog)
 - Professional events, conferences and seminars you know you will attend (expert blogging)
 - Issues that repeat on a yearly / regular basis and have a relevance to your blog (commemoration of a certain event etc.)
- **Pin down the most important issues that will happen mid-term**
 - Follow the same way of thinking: what is lying ahead of you within the next three months?
 - Add seasonality to your blogging: adjust your topics to the actual topics of interest of your audience. If you write travel blogging, it might not be the most relevant to describe a trip to frozen Antarctica in detail in the mid of summer holidays (unless it is purposeful and you want to attract more people from the sunny beaches to see the penguins on the icy shores of the ocean)
- **Pin down the most important issues that you count on writing about short term** (within a month or week). Give yourself firm deadlines for filing each blog post from the short term time framework.

- **Cultivate, update and use an idea library.** Mine is called *The Idea Collector* – a single word file on my laptop's main screen that I can open with a single click and add in whatever inspires me to develop future blog posts: interesting articles, news I hear on the radio, ideas from books, ideas from meetings etc. Besides, I always carry a small notepad where I am writing down my thoughts. You might want to look for particular digital applications for your idea management – there are plenty available online. On top of that I am also cultivating an archive / a bank that I call *Know-How Management*, where I store inspiring quotes, texts, pictures and videos suitable for my themes of interest. They come in handy every time I need to illustrate a text for my blog or a presentation for my training. Cultivating a bank of inspiring blogging ideas and visuals will help you in your content sharing practice.

4.2.3.2 Content writing

It is fantastic if you happen to launch your blog after quitting a successful writing career in a newspaper or a PR agency. However, let's admit it: that's not the case with the majority of us.

So, here is some general advice to make your life easier when you start writing for your blog:

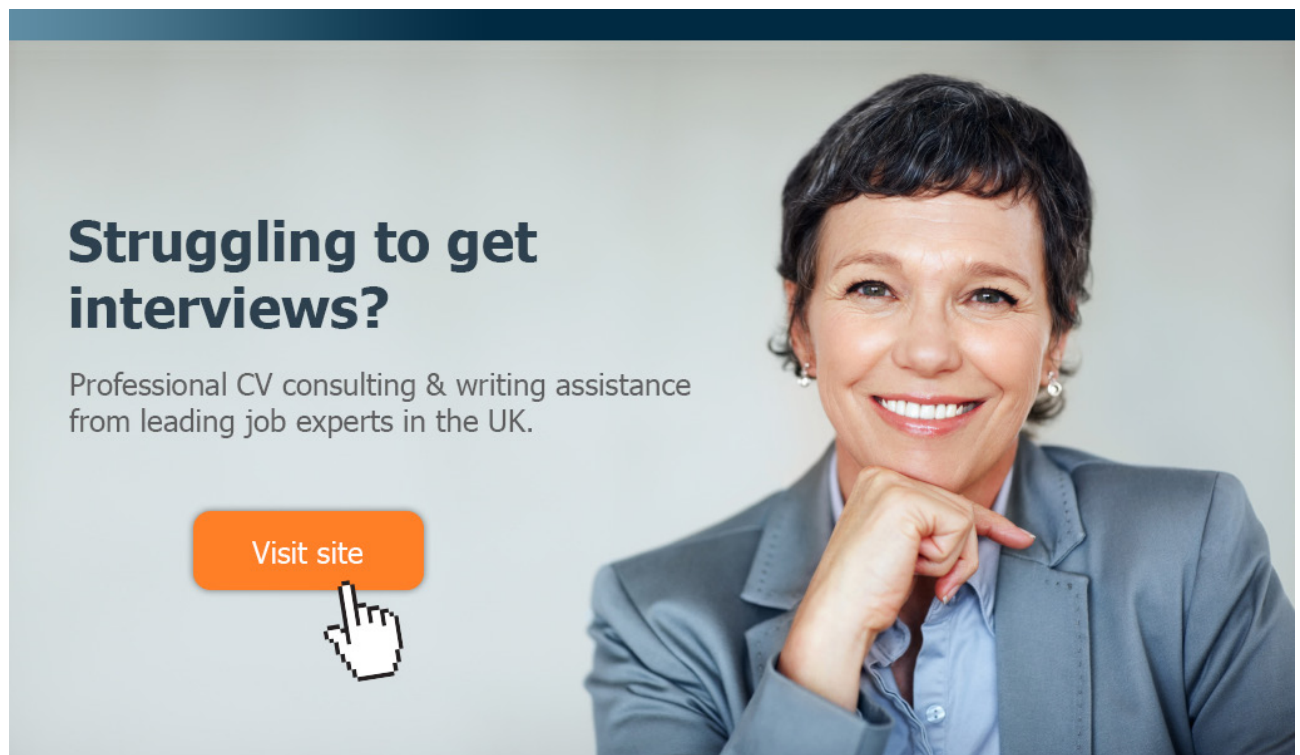
- **Keep your writing short.** If you need to explore an idea in depth, better split it into several posts or onto several pages.
- **Write short sentences.** They are powerful and dynamic. Alternate quick sequences with longer sentences to keep your reader engaged.
- **Use stories.** We humans have been fascinated by stories for centuries. A story with a classical hero, conflict and resolution will bring life and emotions to your blogging.
- **Use visual illustration.** It will make your posts more visually attractive, give the reader a break from the reading process and help pinpoint your ideas.
- For more advice, check specialized blog writing advice on specialized websites such as [ProBlogger](#).

4.2.3.2.1 Opinion writing

Most of your blog posts will be indubitably your personal view of the world. This is fine: this is what blogs are made for. However, opinion writing doesn't mean ranting endlessly with no end – sooner rather than later your reader will say: get to the point. And if you don't, your reader will leave the post as quick as he came.

Here are some pieces of advice on writing opinion:

- **Give your piece of text a structure.** For example: start with stating your opinion, bring in your main arguments then draw a conclusion and / or call for action.
- **Give a separate paragraph to each new argument.** Allow the reader to see and understand when you moved on to the next idea.
- **Use sub-headlines.** Sub-heads are good for the same purpose as separate paragraphs: to help your reader identify when you moved on to your next point. It is also an element that holds the reader's attention when he first scans through the article: if the topics you're promising to address are interesting, he will most probably stay on your blog for the rest of your post.



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4.2.3.2.2 News writing

We all might have our opinions on things, but few of us are actually able to discover and bring up truly newsworthy content for our readers. This is why news reporting on your blog might attract more readers than opinion writing.

Here are a few principles for healthy news writing:

- **Use the inverted pyramid.** It means the most important fact: the news comes first. There is no reason for you to prolong the reader's agony and deliver the news at a later stage in your writing: by then the reader might be long gone.
- **Check your facts.** Remember that what goes in written stays in written and your facts can be easily double-checked, commented and retorted by your readers. Do your homework and check your facts prior to writing about them.
- **Cover your back.** If you have proof: documents, materials, print screens, anything that can visually support your claims, use them in the post.
- **Use quotes.** Bringing several voices to your text will not only make your text more readable, it will also give it more credibility.
- **Stay short.** Even if you have a richness of details on the topic, for the sake of your reader's attention span split your blog into several posts. Launch your news, explain what happened, add in a few details then link to other posts meant to develop those details. Your readers will certainly appreciate it.

4.2.3.2.3 Feature writing

Feature writing has pretty much the same rules as news writing, with the exception that it allows you to go into more details and be more picturesque in your description. A journalistic style much favorite by the European media, feature writing allows you to describe unique experiences, take the reader to new places and allow him to see the world with your eyes. Remember: the basic principles of blog writing apply here as well – stay concise, write powerfully and visually back-up your statements.

4.2.3.2.4 Interview writing

Email, personal or video interviews are one of the most generous forms of content management. All you need is an interesting “source,” do your research on her background and ask some interesting questions. The tricky thing about interviews is that they are only as good as your sources. Learn to do proper research on your interviewee, listen, integrate what you hear and ask powerful questions and you will retain your readers' attention for the whole length of the interview. You might also want to consider publishing an interview into several episodes: my journalistic experience shows that a person can speak up to 5000 words in half an hour, which is the length of some 5 to 10 blog posts. Sort through the answers and publish only what you consider to be relevant information for your audience.

4.2.3.2.5 Profile writing.

People or organization profile writing is a more complex writing genre; yet, it can bring your blog a unique flavor and qualify you as a powerful writer.

Here are a few principles to follow when drawing someone's portrait:

- Clarify the reason why you're writing this portrait right now (newsworthiness, uniqueness of the profile etc.)
- Do a proper research on the person or organization's background
- Note down the most important milestones in the person or organization's life
- Double-check your information and facts
- Talk to the source: person or organization
- Get as many relevant quotes from people familiar with the source
- Write sensitively, yet well-balanced. Allow your sources to have their voices heard in your post, yet make sure the final outcome comes as a compact informative product for your reader.

4.2.4 Facebook

So, now you've got a blog where you post regular content and a social platform where you already promote your know-how: LinkedIn. However, you might want to enhance your reach and bring more of your personality and more emotions to your communication. One of the best tools to consider next – unless you're not there yet, which you most probably are – is Facebook.

Entire books have been written about Facebook as well, so again I will not go into technical details of how a Facebook account works. I will only emphasize the most important aspects of Facebook usage from the perspective of strategic digital communication and personal image management. I will also point at those aspects that influence whether your Facebook profile serves your purposes, adds value to your brand or, actually, it adds more risks than benefits to your digital communication.

4.2.4.1 Basic information

As of May 2014 Facebook had 1.3 billion monthly active users. That is a more than a seventh of our entire world's population present on one single communication platform. The Facebook phenomenon has opened up possibilities of connecting and staying in touch with people across the globe that we have never envisaged before. It reunited friends and families; it has also become one of the most common causes of divorce in the United States. Loved or hated, Facebook has become an integral part of our life. For companies, Facebook created a unique market and possibility to reach out to massive audiences that it never hesitates to use into its own benefits.

4.2.4.2. Common mistakes on Facebook

Here are some of the most common mistakes made on Facebook:

- **Public profile:** not adjusting your privacy settings and allowing everyone looking for you online to have access to all your Facebook history
- **Confidentiality:** when you share too much personal information on your profile you might not only disclose issues that make you the ideal target of unwanted online marketing campaigns, you might also attract criminality in real life (robbery, burglary or stalking)
- **Everyone in:** not managing your community and taking everyone on board just for the sake of having more “friends” might expose you to unwanted situations when people gain access to more than your network: they gain access to your moves, emotions and state-of-mind.
- **Post view:** managing who can see you post can help you to avoid unwanted and potentially embarrassing situations with your family / friends / colleagues / employer.
- **Tagging:** Managing who can tag you on a Facebook status or photo can help you avoid embarrassing situations when people share inadequate information with your community.
- **Not monitoring your social media presence.** Here are [a few tools](#) that can help you to cast an eye on what is being said about your name on social media.



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4.2.4.3 Personal image management on Facebook

Facebook has become a viral social media platform because it activates something much deeper than the logical need of informing our surroundings about our developments. Facebook is powerful because it involves emotions: it activates emotions, it cultivates emotions and it transmits emotions instantly.

This is why it has become one of the favorite communication channels for business-to-consumer (B2C) and non-governmental organizations who can benefit from its viral power: emotions are communicated instantly through powerful videos, pictures and text statuses. This is why Facebook has also become one of the first platforms that come to our mind when it comes to placing an angry complaint about something we experienced. Overall, Facebook is a great servant, but a very poor master.

Go back to the role of powerful emotions and community engagement in achieving your life goals stated at the beginning. If your goal is to be in touch with your friends, to be present and active in your community or to share powerful stories with a maximum of reach, Facebook might be an ideal communications channel. However, bear in mind that Facebook can still be a wicked double-edge sword: you might not WANT to use it strategically, but it can be used strategically against you. For example, in real life you claim you've been at school / work / home, but your Facebook status tells a different story; in real life you claim never to use profanities, but your virtual profile tells a different story, etc.

It is not even so much about what type of information is out there about you or that you post on Facebook: it is much more about how consistent that information is with the type of image that you are trying to create in real life. From the point of view of strategic communication on Facebook, it's not so much about what you're posting on the platform. It is much more about the following question: *can you fully identify yourself with your profile also in real life regardless the circumstances?* Take a moment to breathe deeply and ask yourself this question before posting your next status update. Long term, such a measure will serve you well.

4.2.4.4 Crisis communication on Facebook

What are the sources of potential crisis communication on Facebook? It depends on who you are: from someone posting an inappropriate picture of you to a powerful complain about your services that reaches your entire audience with unspeakable effects on your reputation. Such issues can occur to anyone, anytime. What can you do about it?

Advice for handling crisis communication on Facebook:

- Make sure your privacy, posting and tagging settings are adjusted according to your will, goals and intentions
- Regardless of what someone is posting, do NEVER react impulsively
- Analyze the potential damage of the posting

- Take appropriate action:
 - Individuals:
 - If someone is engaging in a challenging / inappropriate / vulgar conversation, stay polite and try to take the conversation offline. If it leads nowhere, analyze the impact of the conversation on your image and community and decide upon removing the person from your list.
 - If someone posts an inappropriate status or picture of you unintentionally, kindly ask them to remove it.
 - If someone posts an inappropriate status or picture of you intentionally and they don't react to your call for removing it, mark it as inappropriate content and activate Facebook user center for support
 - Companies:
 - If someone is making a complaint, NEVER EVER delete it. It will only aggravate the situation and innerve the person on the other side. Show empathy and try to take the conversation offline. Solve the complaint and at the end make sure that you post a message stating how the situation was resolved. It pays off long term: when someone in the future finds the negative conversation, he or she will value the way you handled a potential unhappy customer.



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BOX: The “PR specialist”

My Facebook community comprises about 900 professional and personal contacts under the same account, split into eight lists according to language preferences and topics of interest (Romanian, English, Czech and French business and friends). In 2013 I experienced a situation that showed me new levels of crisis communication on Facebook.

That morning I had just read a powerful column written by a friend who is also the head of the Czech Association of PR Agencies (APRA). As it happens, he is also among my Facebook contacts. Willing to share my enthusiasm for his ideas, I posted a link to his post on my profile AND alerted him to my post via an @ marker attached to his name in my post – a way Facebook is using to allow people to interact instantly with each other via their statuses. Thus, my post of praise became fully visible in his community. Nothing bad so far.

In less than an hour, one of my contacts, a fellow local PR person started criticizing the post and its author on my profile. Her language was low, if not vulgar. Now, “thanks” to me, her inappropriate comments would reach straight to my friend and his Facebook community. I was angry.

Taking a deep breath, I decided to react politely, yet clearly distancing myself from her approach. *“While I usually value your opinions, this time I cannot agree. I am also not sure I can identify with the tone of your comments,”* I wrote. My hope was: maybe she will just stop. She didn’t. In fact, she continued posting more and more vulgar comments under the post. An hour later, my phone rang: my friend, the author of the text, asked me who the lady was and whether it was worth reacting to her comments. I said no, I would handle it. Then I tried to call her.

She wouldn’t answer. I texted her with a note to please call me back to discuss her opinion personally. Her answer via SMS was: *“Why don’t you f*** yourself and your friend, too?”*

Wow.

Then – God bless her – she took one more step. She deleted me from her Facebook friends. Thus, at least, she couldn’t comment on the post anymore. So I deleted the post as well.

There is nothing that can prepare you for such situations. Your only weapon is cold blood, analysis, thinking things through and decency. Unfortunately, such hit-and-run reactions are quite common on Facebook. Make sure your “friends” are carefully selected and that you are merciless with eliminating them from your community at the first sign of inappropriate behavior. **Unfortunately, not even the business community is immune to trolls and sociopaths.**

4.2.5 Twitter

Another incredibly valuable social media platform in terms of community building is Twitter. The 140-character micro-blogging platform is becoming more and more a favorite tool for know-how sharing and instant messaging. Twitter is integrated with LinkedIn to the extent that, if you post something on LinkedIn, it may become visible on your Twitter profile as well. For private, corporate or political purposes, Twitter engages people thanks to the speed of its information distribution.

Here are a few reasons why you might want to consider being on Twitter:

- It allows you access to instant information on a specific topic of interest from sources across the globe
- It’s time effective: you can only post 140 characters in one message
- It allows you to reach out directly and message people from your community
- It allows you to share short messages and pictures with a global audience.

From the point of view of strategic communication, Twitter is a valuable source of information and a platform to share your expertise. If you plan to join the mainstream with the volume of know-how you are ready to share with the world, Twitter is worth your consideration.

4.2.6 Google+

Google+, the social network launched by Google Inc. in June 2011, has been often called “a ghost city.” On the other hand, with 540 million monthly active users as of October 2013 Google+ is the second-largest social networking site in the world after Facebook. Google has described Google+ as a “social layer” that enhances many of its online properties, and that it is not simply a social networking website, but also an authorship tool that associates web-content directly with its owner/author. This is exactly why Google+ is important for personal image management and strategic communication. If you have a blog or run content online, being present and active on Google+ will considerably enhance your chances of being placed high in the Google top search results. Rather than perceiving Google+ like another pain-in-the-neck network to belong to, it is important to see Google+ for what it is: a means to get more visitors to your existing blog.

There are other social media platforms that might be taken into consideration:

- FourSquare
- Pinterest
- Twoo
- Instagram etc.

Some of them are simply trendy platforms; some of them might feature potential that we are not currently grasping. Make sure that whatever platform you choose to boost your visibility and support your communication, your efforts are in line with the goals stated at the beginning. At the end of the day, this is the only way you can consciously manage your life and turn digital communication into your servant, not your master. As long as you think strategically, digital communication will work in your advantage.

5 Strategic communications for start-ups and small enterprises: brand management

So far I have been discussing tools valuable for individual, personal image management rather than for corporate communications management. However, all the tools mentioned above are valuable also into the corporate environment: today it's sufficient to run a well-done Facebook page if you're a non-governmental organization and you can reach your purposes and engage the community into your activities. However, your attention span increases once you start thinking like a business. Dealing with the potential of strategic digital communications for businesses is the focus on the lines below.

5.1 Understand your audience: Buyer Personas

One of the most important things once you start tackling communication for business purposes are your customers: *who are they and what they want?*

Now it's not just about your readers or potential employer: it is about your clients who are supposed to "buy" your ideas and thus boost your business. Your customers need not only to read you, be informed about your updates and trust you, but also they need to be willing to "buy." There is no strategic communication for businesses if it is not directly connected to your economic results.

In this regard, one of the most interesting concepts was developed by [David Meerman Scott](#) in his book [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#). He notes that, if you like to understand your audience, try to develop a detailed profile of your customer – a so-called buyer persona. Don't hesitate to give your persona a name and describe him or her to the best of detail.

A typical buyer persona might include:

- Gender
- Age
- Level of education, most probable institution they graduated
- Type / level of employment
- Topics they're dealing with, things that don't let them sleep at night
- Media they're using for information and decision-making
- Patterns of speech: how they describe their challenges and the solutions you might want to provide to them
- A picture of the typical Buyer etc.

BOX: Tom the Spokesman

Here is an example of a buyer persona for my company **Media Education CEE**. I sell media training, so most often I come in contact with corporate spokespeople who look for a trainer for their management. Let's call this potential customer Tom.

What do I know about him? Tom is Czech. He is 25 to 40 years old. He is the head of the PR and communications department of his organization.

Tom has most probably a degree in communication from the Charles University in Prague, the Masaryk University in Brno or the High School of Economics in Prague. After graduation he either joined a PR agency where he grew to become a PR account manager, or he joined the company in-house from an early stage. He might have also joined the company from another profession – journalism.

Tom's **goal** is to make his company as visible and respected on the Czech / CEE market as possible.

Tom **aspires** to be seen and recognized for his good work. Sometimes he would like to innovate – the younger he is, the more he'd like to innovate – but he doesn't have much room for that. Therefore, Tom is quite conservative.

Tom **measures visibility** according to the number of press clips / website visitors / Facebook and Twitter profile followers. His goal is to get as many press clips as possible because this reflects him doing a good job, which is reflected in his salary.

Tom's problem is that, in order to communicate, **he needs his management to be willing to communicate**. Tom would like to convince his CEO and management team to communicate more. This is why he is open to approve media training and coaching budgets. He wants somebody else to explain his managers the same message he's been repeating over and over again: if we want to communicate, you need to be able to communicate.

Tom also needs help with generating and editing content and expert articles for his company. For that he is most probably using the services of a PR agency. Yet, he is not always happy with their services because they don't listen to him and sometimes fail to meet his expectations.

From time to time Tom is confronted with crisis communication. Tom is quite stressed because there are no processes in place in case a crisis erupts. Most probably in crisis situations he doesn't have an action plan ready and he doesn't know what to do. He needs crisis communication planning and management.

For himself, Tom might want to continue learning and growing, but he doesn't have many options on the Czech market. He is reading Marketing & Media, Strategie and the other Czech economic media and he is following the courses available from the Czech Association of PR Agencies. From time to time he flies abroad for special training. That doesn't happen more than once a year. In order to grow, Tom needs tailor-made training and coaching, yet his company isn't always willing to invest into his growth.

Thanks to this detailed Buyer Personal profile I can adjust both my means of communication to reach out to Tom and my possibility to adjust offers in order to address his real needs. Don't hesitate to create detailed Buyer Personas for your business: be creative, add pictures to your profiles, keep them at hand and update them regularly. Remember the scene from *Chocolat*? This is exactly what Buyer Personas help you to achieve: a real understanding of your customer.

Here are a few more things you can do to understand your audience:

Once a year do one of the following exercises to monitor the information consumption habits of your target audience:

- **Random phone survey:** Call 10 to 15 clients that correspond to your key audience and conduct a light conversation on their main sources of information;
- **Digital survey:** Create an online survey and share it with your main customers;
- **Targeted interview:** Conduct face-to-face targeted conversations with selected clients on the topic of their information consumption habits;
- **Focus group:** Bring together six to 10 key clients to the same room for 60 to 120 minutes and conduct a facilitated discussion on their information consumption habits.

5.1.1 How to create key messages

The second most important aspect when talking to your audience as a business is the clarity of your message. Now you have a vision and you have clearly set goals: we clarified that at the beginning. However, take a few more minutes to make sure that what you communicate is fully in line with your business mission.

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Take 60 to 90 minutes to do the following exercise:

- Write down every single thing that you'd like to tell your market / your customers
- Make a hierarchy of your messages — the most important ones go to the top
- Choose five to 10 most important messages that came up high in the hierarchy
- See if any of them can be combined and stated in a more powerful way
- Create a new hierarchy with up to three messages
- Continue combining and integrating your messages till you reach one core message. This is your key message for your overall market.

5.2 Emailing

Once you've got your goals, your message and your tailor-made offer for your key Buyer Personas, you will want to distribute it. Here is where your investment into LinkedIn comes in handy: it is one of the first common messaging platforms that you might want to use in order to address your professional community. Yet, sooner or later you might want to start looking for a professional emailing system and start to use it professionally.

Reasons you might want to consider using a professional emailing system:

- It looks professional
- It gives you a structured template for your message
- You can repeat that template for future messages
- It saves you time in distributing the messages
- It allows you to see who received, who opened your message and how many times
- It allows you to measure the impact of your emailing communication.

Thus, you can follow-up to your targeted contacts and raise the chances of actually closing the deals in real life.

Here is an overview of the most common professional emailing systems:

- MailChimp
- Campaign Monitor
- ExactTarget
- Dot Mailer
- Emma and many more.

You might also want to look locally for tailor-made solutions to your level of budget and communication. In the Czech Republic a platform called Smart Emailing has become quite a favorite tool for local businesses.

5.3 Strategic contact management: CRM

Just like in the case of your emailing system, at the beginning you might be happy with just a basic contact management system provided by your email provider: Outlook, Gmail or others. Again, LinkedIn proves to be a valuable collection of professional contacts that you can store, tag and use for your benefit. However, in time, implementing a professional client relationship management (CRM) system is a good idea for several reasons:

- It keeps track of your previous communication with given customers
- It provides you with individual analysis of your sales per phase of the sales process
- It can integrate invoicing and thus save time in your accounting management.

Here is an overview of the most common professional CRM systems:

- Salesforce
- Microsoft Dynamics CRM
- Sugar CRM
- CampaignerCRM
- InfusionSoft etc.

Again, like in the case of emailing systems, you might also want to look locally for tailor-made CRM solutions suitable to your level of budget and sales management.

5.4 Your website

You may wonder why it is only now that I am bringing up the issue of your website. After all, today a business doesn't exist unless it has a website, right?

Indeed, I agree: your website is the most important point of your strategic digital communication. It is the hub where everything connects and where you can and should exert your most powerful digital presence. In fact, this is your virtual identity and it needs to be perfectly in line with your identity in real life.

However, it is very often that companies launch a static website and leave matters there. Such a website doesn't bring them a tiny bit of the value that their website could create for them should the company manage the digital communication tools already discussed strategically: LinkedIn profiles, blogging, Facebook community management, Twitter sharing and so on. Here is why: your most important goal is to attract traffic to your website. This is where you can transform visits into sales leads and later into deals. More leads and later more sales is the reason why you make all these efforts: you generate content, you create videos, you share stuff on social media – to bring back people to your website. Yet, if your links on your digital communication platform lead people back to a poor website that doesn't sell and the visitor leaves in a matter of seconds, you've lost the most important element of your strategic digital efforts: turning communication into real business.

I repeat: your website is the absolute key to everything you do in terms of digital communication for business. Unless you have your website under control and you don't leverage its reach, your efforts are nice-to-have, yet mostly in vain.

Here are a few aspects you should keep in mind when managing your website:

- Do you see it as just another tool of top-down communication or it is actually stimulating real interaction with your public?
- How much is your website designed according to what the people coming to visit you need as opposed to what you want to tell them?
- To what extent does your content management system (CMS) allow you to flexibly manage your interaction with your visitors?
- How fast can you change items on your website when your communication priorities are changing?
- Does your website feature a good capacity to integrate and leverage your other digital communication tools such as your blog, social media profiles, videos, content sharing platforms and so on?

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The advertisement features a young woman with long dark hair, smiling broadly, wearing a white blazer. The background is a blurred city street. A red diagonal line is on the right side. The AXA logo is in the bottom right corner.



Given the complexity of website management – entire books have been written on this topic only – I will not delve into more details. Yet, from the perspective of strategic communications in the digital era, your website is your heart: if it pumps regularly, your business body will work at full potential. If the heart stops beating or is clogged with useless information for the readers, it is guaranteed that you will start feeling it sooner or later in your bottom line.

5.5 SEO basics: content management

I have discussed the basis of content management in the Blogging chapter, so I will not return to it. Yet, a few words need to be said about the issue of search engine optimization (SEO). Your success online is primarily defined by your capacity to generate fresh content and strategic links around your terms of interest. If you want to become identified with specific concepts in your industry, it is in your best interest to make sure these key words keep repeating in connection to your name over and over again.

Here are a few questions to guide you through the process of defining your unique identity, the DNA of your company that no one else can replicate:

- *When were you founded? Who were your founders? What was the dream behind their initial actions?*
- *What were the most significant milestones in your existence?*
- *What is the one thing that you do today outstandingly well? How do you do it?*
- *If I would ask your main customers to describe what you do for them, what would they say?*
- *If I would ask your main customers to describe your relationship, what would he say?*
- *If an 11-year old fairly clever kid would ask your general manager what your company is about, what would he say?*
- *If an 11-year old kid would ask one of your employees what makes working for you so special, what would he say?*

Make sure the landing page of your website states very clearly who you are and what you do. This is as important for your digital audience as it is for reporters looking to understand your business. Remember, no one has time to read through several web pages to finally grasp your business focus.

Allocate 2–3 hours for the following process of defining your identity:

- Bring the most important people who have a word to say in your communications to the same table. These are people like your general manager, your HR manager, your communications manager, other people in your communications team and so on.
- Lay down the questions above
- Facilitate the discussion. Create a safe environment where everyone can speak up their mind and be creative.
- Record people's thoughts and ideas. Listen carefully to the **words they are using** when they describe your company.
- Collect those words on a single list. Articulate them in mutually connected sentences. Simplify the sentences until you reach one short, powerful sentence that catches the very essence of your company identity.

Use key words for success

- Go back to the list of key words you created in the process of defining your identity. Also, observe the list of key messages that you created in the exercise above.
- Observe the words that keep repeating. Are they the same words your target audience would use in order to describe your product / service / company? If not, rephrase them so that you make sure you speak the same language with your audience.
- Retain 15–20 key words that are essential in connection with your company's communication and economic strategy.
- Create a list of these words and share it with everyone involved in communications across your company.
- Encourage people to include these key words in their communication interactions.

This exercise will serve you well particularly when you start running your content online.

5.6 Media relations

You are running your company communication. From the point of view of digital communications you are doing everything right. However, there is one more aspect to consider before moving on: your media relations.

Sooner or later you need to prepare yourself to meet the news representatives and be able to speak in front of a TV camera. Or, by the contrary, you might want to reach out and conduct proactive media relations. Regardless of your intention, don't forget to leverage the outcome of your traditional media relations on your website and social media.

5.6.1 Your media kit

What is a media kit? It is usually a fact sheet that quickly portrays your company or its individual divisions.

Media kits generally include:

- Your full name and type of your company
- Your date of foundation
- Your company structure
- Your current management
- Your current number of employees
- Your main products and services
- Your main client references
- Essential milestones in the company history
- Your financial figures: size of your industry, your turnover and / or net profit etc.

The role of a media kit is to help a reporter grasp really quickly who you are, what you do, for whom and for how much. Many reporters look for financial figures in a company's media kit; you don't need to publish your entire bookkeeping in the kit. However, you don't need to be publicly listed in order to understand that a solid reporter needs economic background to place your company and your story in the right context.

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Similar kits can also be created per division; they can be kept internally for background purposes, or can be shared with the media. Such kits include:

- Division specific background information
- Talking head per division
- Key messages
- Key words, etc.

5.6.2 Set up a powerful digital newsroom

Assume that you have a functioning website and that your name caught the attention of a reporter. The first thing a journalist does when going to your website is to scan through your homepage in search for your Press Room. If you're a media pro who understands how reporters think, here are a few things that you might want to consider placing in your digital newsroom:

- Your media relations contacts, including mobile phone contact
- Your company media kit
- An overview of your company management with downloadable pictures and clear contact information
- A photo gallery with pictures from your industry and operations downloadable in print quality
- A section dedicated to your news releases that might include a SEARCH BY KEYWORD facility, plus the possibility to download the release in a friendly digital format
- A section dedicated to your previous media coverage. This helps the reporter to figure out when and where you have been covered in other outlets, to read more on your background, and to prepare different questions to ask during the interview.

5.6.3 Press releases vs. client releases

David Meerman Scott, in his book [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#), makes a clear distinction between client releases and press releases. Anything that you consider relevant for your company and customers might not be necessarily relevant for the media; thus, select carefully before firing out a press release – most probably the reporter won't be as enthusiastic about the topic of your news as you are.

Classical subjects for client releases:

- Repeated product / service upgrade
- Incoming events / training opportunities
- Changes in customer support staff
- Infrastructure refurbishing
- Rebranding
- Administrative changes – new contacts, new bank account etc.

Classical subjects for press releases:

- Change in top management
- Company financial figures at the end of the year
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Breakthrough developments (innovative product / service launch, etc.)
- Trends in your industry accompanied by adequate comments
- Market research, industry surveys etc.

Bear in mind that what is interesting for reporters is usually interesting for your clients as well. Unfortunately, it is not always the case the other way round. The media isn't there to provide you with a platform to communicate your latest office color refurbishment to your customers. It is out there to generate and deliver authentic, relevant news to its readers.

5.7 Leverage the outcome of your media relations

No media coverage can deliver a maximum of impact for your strategic digital communication unless you learn how to leverage it properly.

Following the publication of a key article here are a few steps that you might want to consider in order to maximize the impact of your media visibility:

- Run the link to the article on all your social media platforms
- Agree with the media outlet to reprint the article in your own communication channels (press room, client and internal newsletter)
- Create a media coverage kit and make it available to your key customers, potential clients and business partners
- Permanently update your digital newsroom with your latest media coverage and blog posts etc.

6 Strategic communications for established companies: managing engagement

As you grow as a company and your resources for strategic communication develop and increase, your scope of activity will go way beyond blogging and running a successful website. The following chapter addresses a few issues that large companies are facing and that can lead to them being successful or not in strategic digital communication.

6.1 The Conversation Prism from Brian Solis

It's enough to take a look at Brian Solis's Conversation Prism for opportunities in terms of strategic communications for established companies and your head starts spinning. Large companies can indeed indulge in all these efforts of strategic digital communication. However, the main goal remains the same: to what extent the company is able to match its digital efforts with its vision, goals and mission of social responsibility.



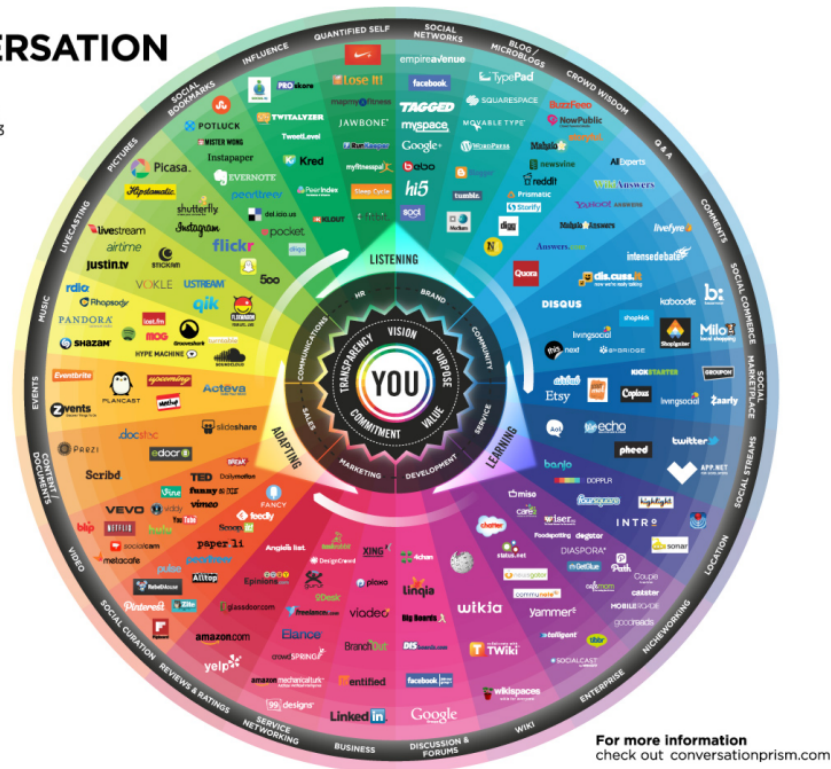
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6.2 Know-how management

6.2.1 Know-how transfer

It is my belief that one of the most important challenges for established companies in the near future is know-how retention, transfer and management. With our population getting older and employee fluctuation increasing during our lifetime, being able to transfer your unique know-how to your new teams might sometimes turn to be a matter of life and death for companies. This is why some tools are priceless in the process:

- Quality internal communications
- Digital corporate storytelling
- Internal mentoring programs etc.

Microsoft, for example, is doing a great job in terms of digital storytelling: it tells its employees' stories online in an attempt to cultivate social engagement.

CREATIVE PRODUCER, XBOX

ALEX HEBERT



Jennifer Warnick
Lead Writer

Talking trash with the first lady of online gaming

Xbox employees consider it gauche to be photographed in front of the Halo Reach statue on the Microsoft campus.

It's fine for tourists to "ooh" and "aah" over the larger-than-life soldiers of Noble Team. It's even fine for visitors to linger for an awkwardly long time, hell-bent on creating the perfect selfie with Master Chief. But if you work there? If you work there, show some restraint, man. There's no quicker way to be labeled a noob.



Around the office, she's known for her work ethic, her ideas, her sense of humor, her bizarre eating habits, and her practical jokes – probably in about that order.

"I studied English for 16 years but...
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons"

Jane, Chinese architect

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6.2.2 Join the conversation: talent discovery, management and retention

The digital arena has empowered companies to search for talent all across the globe: an expert LinkedIn profile from Romania is as valuable as a profile from Russia, Mexico or the United States. It means that, when someone is looking for talent with a particular set of skills, it has become easier to find it than ever before. At the same time, it has become more difficult to retain specific talent: good people are aware of their value and don't hesitate to become mobile in search for new professional and personal growth opportunities.

LinkedIn is a key tool for strategic talent identification today. This is why it received the room it received in this e-book: this network connects individuals and companies at unprecedented levels. At the same time, for talent management and retention your internal communications must work. Here is where we go back to the basics: companies need to identify their values and live up to the expectations they cultivate in employees to be able to retain this key asset. A functional Intranet, an engaging employee publication and the cultivation of a mutually respectful work environment can only come if the company culture integrates communication as one of its core values. Company culture transformation, talent management and retention will be one of the most challenging aspects for companies in the era of digital leadership.

6.2.3 Diversity and multicultural communication

On the one hand it is easier indeed to find talent across the globe. On the other hand, how does such specific talent, often coming from cultures we know little about, influence our company culture?

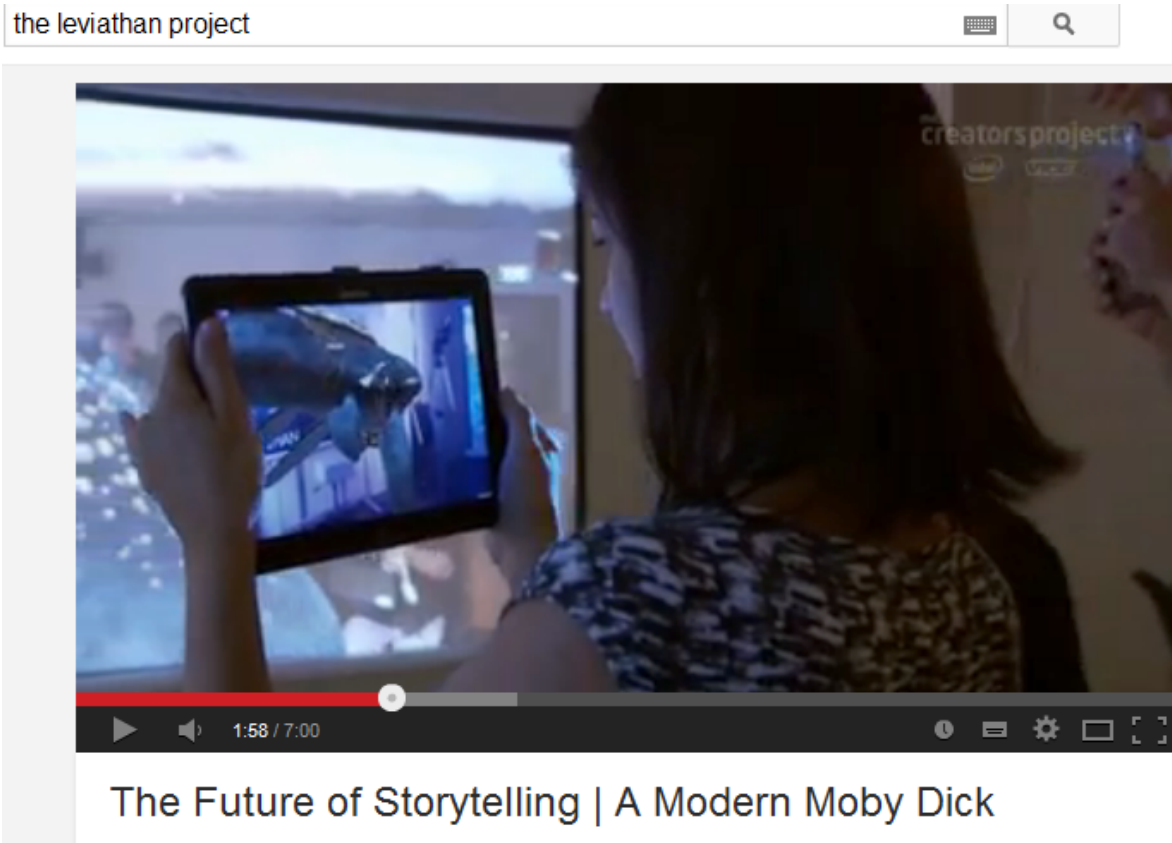
As our world becomes more interconnected, being able to leverage the benefits of diversity: age, beliefs, background, culture and orientation is becoming essential in talent retention and leadership. Again, here is a field where digital communication is supportive but not sufficient: authentic leadership needs to be driven by emotional intelligence as much as by economic intelligence. Authentic leadership in the era of digital communication is a major challenge for established companies today.

6.2.4 Cultivate engagement: storytelling

To close the circle, we go back to the roots. Storytelling – a practice as old as mankind – has been gaining in importance lately, with its role in know-how transfer, leadership and engagement increasing.

Why does storytelling work? Because, as opposed to information, it activates not only the logical centers of our brain, but the deeper layers where we perceive and process emotions. As opposed to dry information, we process stories with our entire bodies. Studies show that engagement raises by more than a half with people exposed to storytelling as opposed to only fact-sharing.

Of course, new digital technologies cannot leave this field unexplored. A successful example of combination between the latest digital devices and traditional storytelling is the [Leviathan Project](#). Many more are certain to join the market in the coming years.



7 Video communication

Last but not least, one of the most powerful tools of communication in today's digital era is video. You can create it simply with your smart phone or can choose to put millions of dollars into its production: a good video can become viral in a matter of days and bring your name to the lips of millions of people.

Best videos have the following ingredients:

- A hero
- A story
- An element of surprise
- Powerful emotions.

Examples of viral videos:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7Flvfx5J10>

best buds commercial



The video player shows a man and a woman interacting with a dog. The man is wearing glasses and a dark jacket, and the woman is wearing a blue vest over a white long-sleeved shirt. They are both smiling and looking at the dog. The video player interface includes a progress bar at 0:02 / 1:00, a volume icon, a play/pause button, and a search icon.

Budweiser Super Bowl XLVIII Commercial -- "Puppy Love"

budweiser · 141 videi

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQB7QRyF4p4>

westjet christmas miracle



The video player shows a young boy wearing a Santa hat and a dark jacket, looking surprised. The video player interface includes a progress bar at 4:03 / 5:25, a volume icon, a play/pause button, and a search icon.

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WestJet Christmas Miracle: real-time giving

WestJet · 259 videi

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8 Strategic crisis communication

Crisis communication is usually the time when true strategic communication mastery is required on or offline. Any entity – individuals, start-ups, small or established companies – can face crisis communication at a moment or another and no one is too big to fail.

For companies, crisis communication situations can occur from fields like:

- **Production**
 - Failure of a new product launch
 - Labor accidents
 - Employment policies
 - Harassment at the workplace, etc.
- **Finance and management**
 - Financial underperformance
 - Management crisis
 - CEO sudden death
 - CEO resignation / dismissal etc.
- **Technology and data management**
 - Information leakage, data security
 - Allegations of abuse of personal data management, etc.

Any of these situations can lead to crisis communication. What is the best strategy to adopt under such circumstances?

How to handle crisis communication:

- Take a deep breath
- Assess the situation. Get all available facts and figures straight
- Get the company top representative on board, present him with the facts and possible development scenarios
- Be fast in expressing compassion. This doesn't mean admitting guilt, as your lawyer might put it. You are simply expressing compassion for the victims, if any, and regret for their loss.
- Be clear in your reasons not to disclose certain facts until full investigation is over
- Adjust your communication channels to the situation (black background website in case of massive labor accident, plane crash etc.)
- Generate videos that put the situation in the right context. Run them on your website and other video communication channels to make sure the public gets your direct side of the story as well.

Turn crisis into an opportunity

Numerous companies choose to stay silent in crisis. Such a strategy can easily backfire and produce more harm than good to your brand and the reputation you have put so much time and effort into building.

As opposed to such companies there are also a few others who learned to transform even the most unfortunate situations into an opportunity to express compassion, solidarity and to communicate the higher values of their institution to the public.

Box: case study LMC

In 2011, LMC, an Internet company that runs two of the most important Czech online job search portals Prace.cz and Jobs.cz found itself under media attack. Research of the Czech Ombudsman Office was pointing at the fact that job search ads on LMC portals were often discriminatory. Even though the ads were run by LMC's corporate clients, the company decided to mobilize its resources and turn the situation into a positive communication opportunity. LMC initiated cooperation with the source of the discrimination claims, the Czech Ombudsman; together, they launched a campaign aimed to build awareness among HR managers and educate companies how to prevent discrimination in their online job search. The campaign allowed the company to elegantly distance itself from the allegations of discrimination and promote its values as a solid business partner for corporate clients and market leader in inclusive online job search. The adequate response by LMC brought the company the Czech Association of Public Relations Agencies (APRA) 2012 Crisis Communication Award. The company cooperation with the Czech Ombudsman continues to this day.

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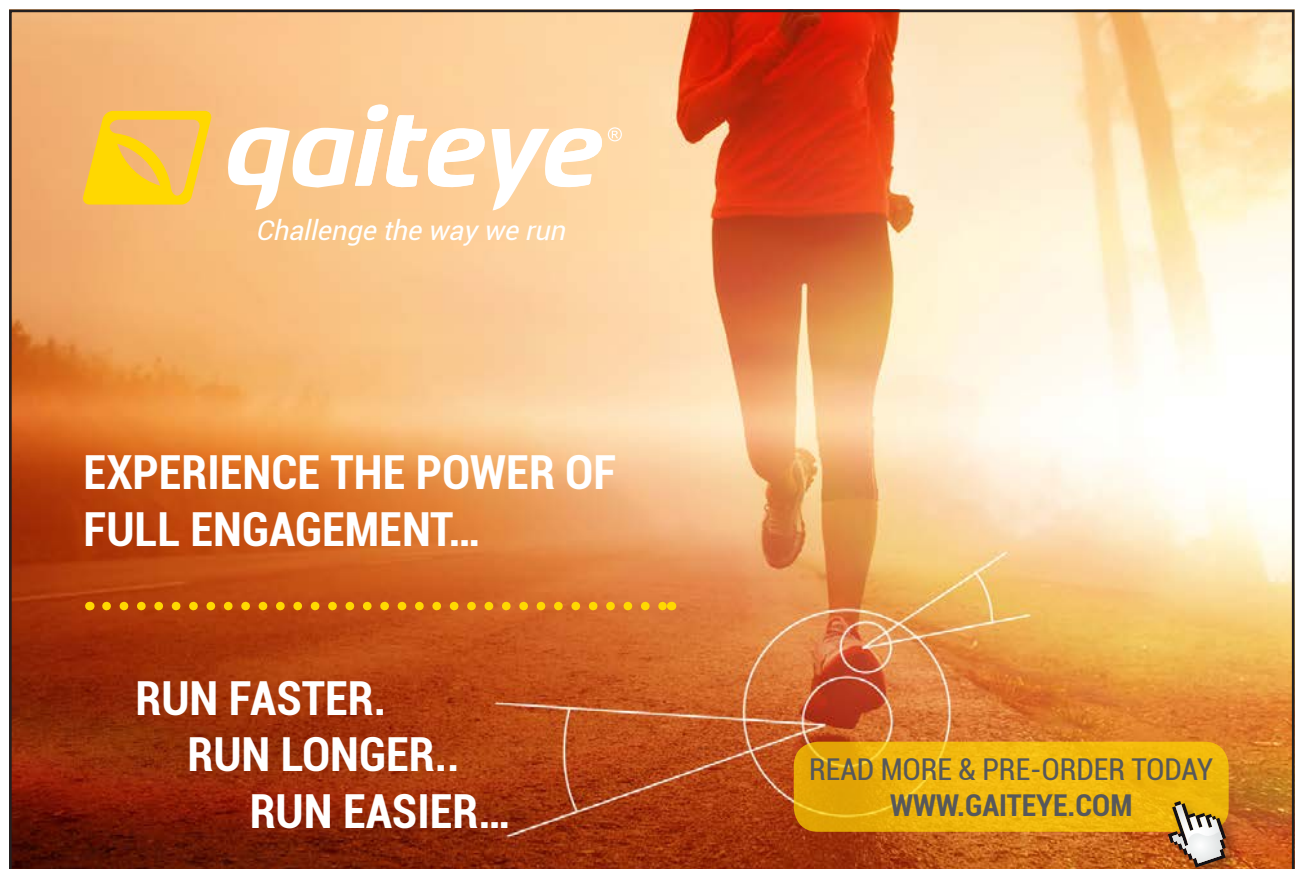
9 Tailor-made advice

9.1.1 Fresh graduates

If you are just about to finish school and looking for your next step, the basics of your strategic communication is to create your LinkedIn profile. It looks good to recruiters and sends a message that you're taking your future career seriously.

Here is some advice on how to turn digital communication to your best advantage:

- Do an online search looking for your name
- Match the results with your goal at this point in your life
- Address all the results that aren't in line with your goals (change public visibility status on some social media accounts, reply to / delete potentially damaging posts, learn to manage tags on Facebook etc.)
- Do not engage into any digital activity that you might later be ashamed of / that you cannot identify with in real life
- Launch a trustworthy LinkedIn profile
- Launch a personal blog focused on your main areas of interest. Publish only information that you can stand by regardless the future circumstances.



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9.1.2 Employee looking for career growth

It is sometimes unbelievable how much information we can receive from informal networks at the workplace. After all, we are all humans.

At this stage in your career you already have some professional experience behind. **Here is some advice on how to best leverage communications for your success:**

- Launch and manage a professional profile on LinkedIn. Carefully select the contacts that you add to your network to be in line with your professional direction and goals.
- Use the formal and informal networks at work to get on the radar of decision-makers that can influence your professional growth.
- Join relevant training and personal development programs at work (coaching, mentoring, personal development).
- Find yourself a sponsor at work – someone willing to support you in your career growth.
- Consciously use all company communication opportunities (internal communications, media relations, public speaking at conferences and seminars etc.) in order to share your achievements and know-how.

9.1.3 Employee looking for new opportunities

If you have already decided that your current company cannot provide you with what you need for your growth, use communication wisely to manage your next move.

Here is some advice on how to use communications for your success in this phase in your life:

- Talk to a few people you can trust who went through a similar experience in the past. Use their experience as a sound board for your own development.
- Before you start making any changes on your LinkedIn profile, make sure your privacy settings are set in a supportive way for your endeavor.
- Update your professional LinkedIn profile with your most recent achievements.
- Look for professional recruiters and headhunters online.
- Take the conversation offline.
- Decide what know-how you'd like to leave behind at your current job. If appropriate, discuss with your employer for the best option to handle your exit from a communications perspective.
- Once you join a new enterprise, handle your communications consciously:
 - Create a message that best defines you, your vision and mission for your colleagues, higher management and eventual subordinates.
 - Don't hesitate to explore the communication opportunities at your new labor place. One day your communications efforts will bear fruits when you will be looking for your next change.

9.1.4 Launching your own business

Leaving the stress of a quarterly-result driven corporate world to launch your own business and live your dream might be a precious consideration at a certain point in your career. However, if you are employed, here is some advice on how to handle communication before you launch yourself in the new adventure:

- Reach out to a few people who experienced a similar change in the past. Listen to their story and try to learn from their mistakes.
- If you can, create yourself some healthy financial reserves.
- Do as much research as you can on your idea, your potential market and your competitors.
- Draft your potential Buyer Personas.
- Meet your potential clients, discuss the idea and see the conditions they need accomplished to be willing to buy your products.
- Ask your potential customers what means of communications they are using. This information will be extremely useful in the next step: how to handle strategic communications for a start-up.

9.1.5 Managing communications for an established company

When you are in charge of communications for a large / established company, remember that the online and offline world are closer than you might think. Choose quality over quantity and remember:

- Leadership exists only when people can trust their authorities
- Know-how management will be one of the most significant challenges of the incoming years
- Company cultures are experiencing a deep transformation under the challenge of generation dynamics, new technologies and diversity inclusion
- Turn diversity into a power engine for innovation
- Create online and offline programs to manage and retain talent. With people fluctuation increasing, for many companies the capacity to retain key people, transfer know-how and tell their story to the world will make the main difference between long-term sustainable development and survival.

10 Conclusion

Digital communications matter today more than ever before; we can only expect their role to increase in the future. For many of us a burden rather than a conscious voluntary choice, digital communications add noise to our lives. However, when conducted strategically, they can be a tool that can enhance our growth beyond means.

For the last quarter of a century digital communications opened room for finding, processing and using information to learn more, know more and do more with our lives. Yet, it comes down to us how we use these new marvels of technology. Strategic communications in the digital era might be a paradoxical shift back to the essentials: to doing only what matters, when it matters and how it matters. To be a master and not a servant in the relationship with digital and social media, think your communication strategically. And enjoy the benefits of our current digital world at its full potential.

Q: If someone from the 1950s suddenly appeared today, what would be the most difficult thing to explain to them about life today?

A: I possess a device, in my pocket, that is capable of accessing the entirety of information known to man. I use it to look at pictures of cats and get in arguments with strangers.

Source: Facebook discussion group ScienceDump

Cristina Muntean
Prague, May 11, 2014