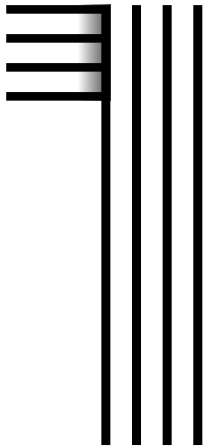


Six step guide to effective corporate communication



Define Your Story

Knowing what your corporate story is may sound straight forward, but it is incredible how many companies fail to engage with this simple step.

Having no framework for what the company story should be means there will be no building blocks on which to build.

Far too many executives in senior management do not see the wood for the trees when it comes to what they want the world to learn about their company.

The story of the firm's growth is key, but more important is to understand the messages the senior team wishes to relay on its journey, and how these may be relayed to the media.

Next year's corporate story may be focussed on a particular element of the business, or a drive around graduate recruitment, RnD or expansion.

Going through a discovery process to seek stories contained within the wider corporate structure is a key step.

Building a campaign which resonates with the media is the next part of the jigsaw.



Understand The Changing Media Landscape

If you think you know all of the latest developments in how your various stakeholders consume news and views, the chances are you are probably wrong! There has never been more fluidity in how media brands are delivering content, with cutting-edge companies such as Vice Media, BuzzFeed and Vox Media jumping from the internet into television production.

The consumer has more power than ever before through ever-greater transparency and choice of media, with reader loyalties to particular newspapers or magazines becoming a thing of the past. Digital platforms such as A Plus and the Huffington Post are just as likely to be skimmed for news and views as the BBC or Mail Online, with Facebook and Twitter universally used by all generations to instantly share content.

We are seeing the increased use of high quality video content online to supplement (and in some cases replace) written news reporting and in-depth features. The Economist now has a dedicated section for long-form documentary reporting on its website, whilst the FT is increasingly delivering interviews via its in-house TV studio and creating video-based special reports.

What does all this mean? That it is crucial to ensure you are aware of the key changes that are taking place in media and understand the ever increasing avenues through which to communicate to stakeholders and vice versa, be informed by them. The great democratisation of our media is an overwhelmingly positive thing and allows you to connect to your audience like never before. It also, however, increases the speed at which bad news travels, and therefore it's important to stay on top of what is being said about you and where.



Think Big – Globally Recognised Media Platforms

There is no harm in setting sights towards different areas of the media. Your company may have had reasonable success with certain business titles, trade media and the odd piece in national newspapers.

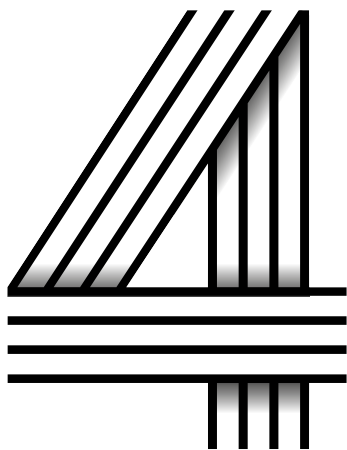
It's time to adopt a strategy to think bigger. While trade and regional titles should never be overlooked, the power of a positive piece in the Financial Times or similar cannot be overstated.

Seeing business rivals or indeed colleagues featured in the business pages of the national press, either in terms of profiles or thought leadership, means they are doing something you are not. It is not luck but the result of joined-up thinking and forming relationships with journalists.

But why stop at newsprint or online?

Television and radio are mediums so many CEOs are uncomfortable with.

Both should be embraced and form part of the corporate strategy. This level of engagement needs to be delivered with expert care.



Media Training- Get It Done.

There are several things in the corporate world which undeniably are put to the back of the queue. Chances are media training does not even make it to the list. It should.

Far too often at PHA Media we see CEOs, MDs and CFOs being scrambled around to complete media training because there is an urgent need.

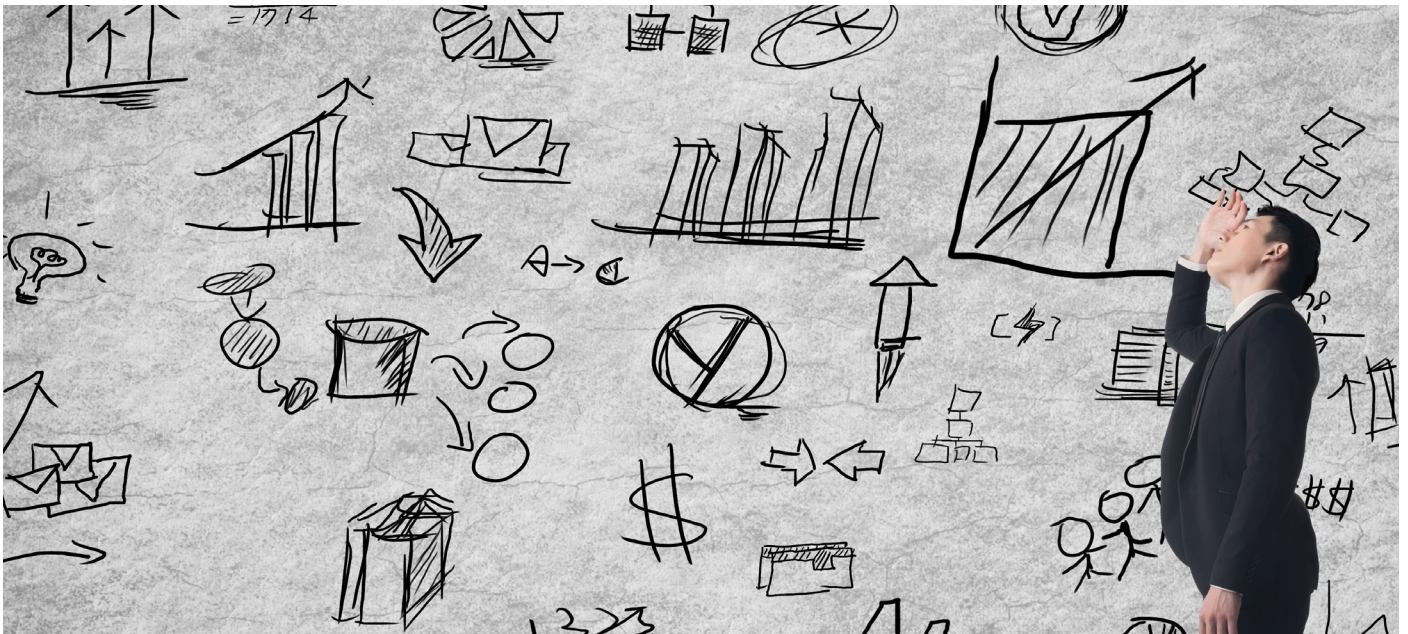
That could mean the company is faced with a crisis, or that there is a media opportunity which is too good to refuse.

Media skills should be in the locker of any modern day CEO or senior executive. As with any form of upskilling, training is the best route to follow.

Media training will provide the skills to tackle radio and TV interviews, teach an understanding of journalists and the media, and ultimately give you the tools with which to air the company's important messages and stories.

During media interviews, whatever the circumstances, CEOs are the window to the world for their company even more than usual. That means being able to not only cope with but expertly execute an interview which may only be three minutes long is a vital component in the wider campaign.

So it's a matter of not only putting media training on the list, but making it a priority.



Prepare For Every Scenario

Crises can hit at any time and the key to handling them is being prepared. Whilst you almost certainly have a plan in place, ask yourself: when was the last time it was reviewed? If the answer is more than six months ago, then it is high time to re-visit. Good practice in crisis communications is based on the principles of swift actions, getting the facts and knowing what to do, who is performing which role, and when.

The key is to control the crisis at the source where possible, and to lessen – or remove – the impact of it on business continuation and stakeholders.

Consider and prepare for all business-critical scenarios and ensure that a robust plan of action is in place in each situation with clear responsibilities within your core team. Then, re-think and then think again about those scenarios. If the potential issue is one which is highly unlikely to materialise, then it should be incorporated into your planning. The crises which often hit the hardest are the ones where the underlying cause went under the radar.



Good Communication Starts At Home

A study by Towers Watson in 2010 concluded that companies with highly effective communication practices enjoy 47% higher total returns to shareholders compared with the firms that are least effective at communicating. It pays, literally, to talk.

If you are a small company with just a handful of employees, the chances are that you communicate well and that ideas flow freely between the group. However, as firms grow in revenue and in employees, internal communication can collapse unless a robust and long-term structure is in place. Work becomes compartmentalised, employees work in different locations, reporting structures are created that divide groups and individuals, and flow of dialogue decreases.

With a poor internal communication structure, leadership becomes isolated and decisions are made that can alienate various stakeholders because their input hasn't been sought.

An annual audit of your company's internal communications framework can help ensure that you pinpoint where the gaps are in how information flows through the business, from the boardroom to 'shop floor' and vice versa. Five year internal communication strategies are all very well, but by not paying attention to what's happening here and now in your business, small issues have the potential to create bigger problems down the line.

For advice and guidance on constructing your Corporate Communications strategy for the coming year, get in touch with one of our experts.