

What Will the Study Reveals Opportunities for

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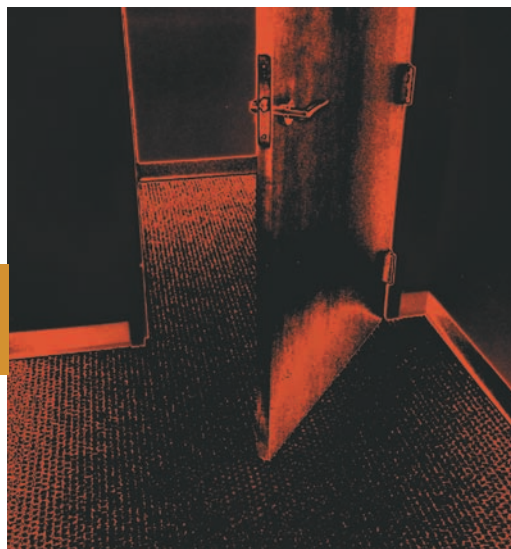
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Communication professionals have many opportunities to add value to their organizations while shaping new roles for themselves. As revealed in "Future Trends," a study conducted by Towers Perrin in collaboration with the IABC Research Foundation, communication practitioners contribute to their organizations' success in many ways. The

study involved interviews with more than 30 senior practitioners and electronic survey responses from more than 1,000 IABC members worldwide.

FINDINGS

> An opportunity exists for communication professionals to change their roles. Communication officers are in the best position to provide information for leaders that flags new trends and anticipates potential changes on the horizon.



Future Hold?

Communicators

- > In addition, there is opportunity to link critical customer responses back to product, marketing and sales employees, helping firms consider new offerings, services or upgrades. And the communication function is well positioned to take the "pulse" of various constituencies and find better ways of motivating and engaging employees.
- > New media and technology have reshaped the way people communicate and conduct business. Speed of access to information and the leveling of how much information can be made available to large numbers of employees and other constituencies have contributed to changes in former models of "cascading" information.
- > In today's economic climate, most communication professionals are focused on pragmatic aspects of helping their organizations maintain or return to profitability—through the communication of expense reductions, alignment communications, and reporting of the business climate and their organizations' competitors.
- > Most communication professionals do not rigorously measure the results of their work.

BUSINESS PRIORITIES AND ISSUES

More than half of the study participants indicated that improving operating performance within their organizations was their top priority. Another 36 percent said cost reduction was among their top three issues, and 32 percent said adapting to industry changes was.

> Other priorities mentioned were "rolling out new communication products and ways of communicating to the market," restoring trust despite current business scandals and supporting new and emerging business opportunities.

> "Communicating and building company image and brand to both internal and external messages" was cited as one of the top ways for the communication function to help the organization achieve its goals.

> Many respondents said training employees to enhance customer service was a priority.

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ACTIONS TO MEET CHALLENGES

In the wake of continuing economic challenges, communicators indicated that they were focusing

their time and attention on the following activities:

1. Communicating and building company image and brand with both internal and external audiences
2. Establishing strategic plans and ways to measure results (although most have not implemented rigorous measurement systems)
3. Training employees to improve customer service
4. Restructuring organizations to fit new business goals.

More than half the respondents indicated that they "always or often" provide coaching for their leaders. Study participants reported that they provide support for company leaders to help them communicate effectively with all audiences and to create appropriate and meaningful context for important messages.

Respondents said they were devoting increasing amounts of time to staging, orchestrating and managing face-to-face meetings. "The need for our employees to hear directly from the CEO and their business unit leader has increased exponentially," reported Macy Andrews, communication manager for the Network Processing Group at Intel Corp., in Santa Clara, Calif.

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'FUTURE TRENDS' DEVELOPED BY TOWERS PERRIN

The Towers Perrin/IABC Research Foundation study identifies business issues and trends influencing communication professionals and their organizations.

More than 1,000 IABC members worldwide completed an online survey. Also interviewed were more than 30 participants in global companies and Fortune 500 firms, who represented a combination of senior communication professionals, senior human resource professionals and CEOs. Among those participating, the majority work for corporations. Consulting firms, public relations firms, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and other sectors were also represented.

Participants in both the qualitative interview and the quantitative portion of the study have been in the communication profession for more than 16 years on average. Respondents have worked within their current organizations an average of three and a half years. Nearly half of the organizations represented in this study are multinational.

This study is coming soon to the IABC Research Foundation web site, www.iabc.com/fdtnweb.

ROLE OF NEW MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Communication departments are taking advantage of established technology, but many have not yet moved into newer ways of using technology. When asked what effect new media have had on communication, many cited changes in the media mix but not profound restructuring because of technology.

- > Fifty-four percent of participants reported reduction in use of traditional print materials.
- > Thirty-three percent reported an increase in use of electronic vehicles for communication (electronic newsletters, e-mail notices, etc.).
- > Twenty-six percent referenced the use of intranets and home pages to share important information.

A LACK OF CONCRETE MEASURES

Study participants reported that they are measuring the results of their work informally or not at all. Rigorous measures are not in use. Participants measure their internal performance through such mechanisms as informal interviews, anecdotal feedback, comments from leadership and the grapevine.

- > Fifty-seven percent of respondents said that informal feedback was used “frequently” and “often.”
- > Thirty-four percent of survey participants said that

they use internal interviews.

- > The method used least frequently was focus groups, at 15 percent.
- > Respondents reported giving little attention to measuring external or media relations efforts, which also rated less than 15 percent.
- > Interviews of participants revealed that almost half lack concrete or formal measurement tools.
- > Many study respondents report the use of employee satisfaction surveys and the extrapolation of communication findings from those studies.

Although an analysis of findings shows that measurement appears to be neglected, study participants claimed that “establishing strategic plans and ways to measure results” was one of their top communication function goals.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Forty-one percent of the participants said that improving communication productivity was an important goal. Few study participants offered solutions for improving productivity. Although alignment of communication goals with corporate goals appears to be clear for all participants, most struggle with prioritizing activities and tasks.



In some cases, the economy has proven to be an obstacle in progress toward various communication goals. Jacquie Mazur, director of the Lucent Experience at Lucent Technologies in Murray Hill, N.J., noted, "We are committed to a fully web-enabled environment, but the human factor is making it difficult in this tense environment to implement that model. If there were more 'business than usual' instead of 'business unusual,' I believe that we'd be more successful."

Proving the economic value of the communication function was cited as both an opportunity and a risk. It's an opportunity to gain influence and establish greater credibility. It's a risk because of the gap in the number of respondents indicating that they have no formal communication mechanisms in place.

Angelika Damman, global external affairs and communications manager with Shell Chemicals, suggested, "Work more closely with the strategy department to ensure and enhance how communication is implemented."

FUTURE GOALS

Study findings suggest a call to action and a need for strengthened leadership among communication

professionals. Communication professionals need to increase their ability to measure results more concretely. Proving the economic value of the communication function is becoming increasingly important. The quantitative survey results showed that change in behavior was one of the measures used to gauge communication performance. Yet only 17 percent of participants reported using these pre- and post-activity assessments to measure performance with both internal and external audiences. What explains this discrepancy? It seems that communication is mostly being measured informally, if it's measured at all.

These challenges, however, could easily be turned into strengths for the future. More than ever before, communication professionals also have tremendous opportunities to drive the functionality, the content of their intranets and Internet and how people use them.

With communication professionals' ability to "take the pulse" of their organizations, to drive brand communication and to create feedback loops between customers and employees, there are many areas of potential growth and ways to add value to their organizations. **CW**

