Assume anything you write for internal communications will end up in unintended places. If you don’t want to see it in print, don’t write it.

4. **Collaboration, not dissent, makes us smarter.** Did you know that the White House has its own wiki, ExpertNet (http://expertnet.wikispaces.com)? Aneesh Chopra, federal chief technology officer, wrote in a post for the Open Government Initiative blog that this wiki has been built on the belief “that everyone has expertise, experience and enthusiasm which, if shared in manageable ways, will help us make smarter decisions together.”

5. **Consider a “strategic press leak.”** When facing an impending bad news story, consider taking a proactive approach and launching what might be called a strategic press leak, says Ben Silverman, who writes for the PR Fuel e-newsletter. It “can be an excellent proactive crisis management tool,” he explains. “By effectively beating the media to a negative story, a company can limit the media’s ability to delve deeper into a story, saving the company from a potential public relations disaster.” Some speculate that Apple carried out a controlled leak of its iPhone 4 last year, when Apple engineer Gray Powell left a prototype of the new device at a bar.

6. **Empower your employees.** “Your employees are the first line between your organization and the general public,” says McCown. “To adequately prevent and/or respond to a threat or crisis, you must engage your friends, your enemies, your employees and the virtual community as a whole.”

7. **Protect. Protect. Protect.** Make sure everyone “from titular head to temp understands your content management, acceptable use and all security/info-related policies,” says David Scott, author of *I.T. WARS: Managing the Business-Technology Weave in the New Millennium.*

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**creative communication** **by steve crescenzo**

**Calling all artists, coaches and community organizers**

Today’s communicators need to be big-picture painters, social media counselors and online conversation starters.

**Note:** This is the third in a four-part series on the new roles communicators are adopting as the profession changes around us.

**Scene:** The CEO’s office at a midsize company. The CEO and his top communicator are sitting at a desk. The communicator is bringing the CEO up to speed on what she needs from him in the next month. The CEO is reading The Wall Street Journal.

**Communicator:** Sir, we need to talk about your column in the employee publication. We go to press tomorrow.

**CEO:** Right.

**Communicator:** Do you have any ideas for content, sir?

**CEO:** What?

**Communicator:** Content. For your column in the employee publication. What would you like me to write about this month?

**CEO:** Oh, that. Right. Uh, when’s the last time we did synergy?

**Communicator:** Last month. And three months before that. I think the employees are a little burned out on synergy.

**CEO:** What about change?

**Communicator:** We did that two months ago. And
we did diversity just before that. We’ve also beaten innovation to hell and back.

CEO: Geez, what’s left? I tell you what. Let’s sneak another synergy column in on them, only this time we’ll call it, uh, building cross-functional excellence! I like that. Wordsmith it up, will you?

Communicator sighs.

What’s wrong with this picture? Well, everything. First of all, there’s a communicator in the C-suite! Somebody call security!

OK, let’s assume the communicator is actually supposed to be there. What’s really wrong with this picture is that she is playing a tired, outdated role. She’s playing the part of the order taker. That’s the role in which communicators just churn out words and check things off their to-do lists, rather than offer real counsel to executives.

Communicators who are stuck in the order-taker role will soon find themselves in the unemployment line. Communicators need to get out of that role and start filling some other, very necessary roles in the modern organization.

In the last issue of CW we talked about seven new roles communicators need to consider moving into as our profession changes around us:

- The Talent
- Talent Scout
- Multimedia Storyteller
- Big-Picture Painter
- Community Organizer
- Social Media Coach
- Creative Strategist

We talked about the first three roles in the last issue. Now let’s talk about the next three.

**Big-Picture Painter**

It used to be easy to find and process information about a company. If you were an employee, you read the employee publication. If you were a reporter, you read the press releases. If you were a shareholder, you read the annual report.

Those days are long gone. Now, along with those channels, companies produce websites, intranets, blogs, e-mails, podcasts, videos, message boards, tweets, Facebook status updates and more. As a result, information is more fragmented than ever before. With so many people churning out so much information in so many channels, it can be hard for anyone to see the big picture—how everything ties together.

That’s where you come in. As a communicator, it’s your job to paint that big picture for your audience. This is especially true for employees, who get stuck in their own silos and tend to pay attention only to what’s right in front of them.

Your job is to show them (a) what’s happening around the company, (b) how what they do matters, (c) the great work their peers are doing and (d) how they fit into the bigger picture.

One way to do that is with a great annual publication. That’s what the bio-sciences company Novozymes did. The communicators there produced a 44-page print (yes, print!) publication titled *This Is Our Business* that took readers through every aspect of the company, giving them a “major overview, from A to Z.” They covered things like “The Backbone” (the science behind the company’s success), “The Customer,”

No matter what channel you use, the important thing is to get out your communication brush and paint that bigger picture for your audience.

About the author

Steve Crescenzo is the leader of the popular “Creative Communications” seminar. His web site is www.crescenzocomm.com.
“The Competition” and “The Boss” (an excellent profile of the CEO).

The best part is a big section called “The Jobs.” That’s where they tracked a product from conception until it is delivered to a customer. They started with R&D, moved through quality business operations, right through to marketing and customer service. They even included the support staff, so everyone would feel like they were part of something bigger than just their own jobs.

The best thing was, they didn’t just give thumbnail sketches of each department. For each one, they chose six or seven employees and profiled them, which gave the publication a human element.

Now, I realize that not everyone can do a 44-page print publication. If you can’t, then do a series of articles on the intranet. Or a series of podcast interviews. No matter what channel you use, the important thing is to get out your communication brush and paint that bigger picture for your audience.

Community Organizer
Communicators need to break out of the “publishers” role. It’s not enough to just push stuff out and hope someone reads/watches/listens to it. These days, our role is to create content and then put it online where people can interact with it and form a community around it.

When I broke into communication, everyone everywhere was striving for “two-way” communication. One-way: We communicate to our audience. Two-way: Our audience communicates back to us. Three-way: The audience communicates with one another.

You don’t have to invest in an internal Facebook-like function for your intranet to make this happen (though that’s not a bad idea, and many companies are doing it). You just have to open up your online content for comments and then create compelling content that people will want to talk about.

Social Media Coach
Executive communication is changing. The days when you could ghostwrite the CEO’s column, stamp a fake signature on the bottom of it and call it executive communication are fading fast.

People want to hear from their leaders. They want authenticity. They want transparency. The good news is, we have the tools to give them what they want. Blogs, interactive video and podcasts can all serve as nonstop, ongoing town hall meetings, where the executives use the medium to deliver their message, and then employees carry on the discussion and ask questions in the comments section. Used properly, these tools are powerful enough to change the entire culture of your organization.

But here’s the thing: Your executives don’t know this. They don’t understand the power of these new tools. In fact, they’re probably afraid of them.

That’s where you come in. Executives need to be coached. They need help. We need to identify the medium that they are best suited for, and help them create content for that medium.

Now, let’s pretend the communicator in the scenario at the beginning of this column was embracing these new roles, instead of just taking orders. First, when it came time to decide on content, rather than falling back on yet another tired old topic, she would have asked the CEO to help explain some component of the bigger picture to employees. After all, the CEO has his fingers in everything. Who better to help paint the big picture?

Then, she would have thought of the best way to create a conversation around the topic. You can’t do that with a print column, so maybe she would have suggested that they do an online version of the column as well, and open it up for comments.

Of course, that would have led her directly into her role as Social Media Coach, and maybe, if she thought the executive had the right stuff, she would help him do a blog where he could treat the topic in conversational fashion and invite comments. Or maybe an interactive video, or a podcast where one lucky employee would get to interview the CEO.

The choices are endless—once you decide that your job is to do more than just take orders.

In the next issue, we’ll tackle the last—and probably most important—new role for communicators: the Creative Strategist.