

WHITE PAPER

**HIGHER EDUCATION AND
THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION**

*The first white paper on the issues of communications
in higher education and research*



NOIR SUR BLANC

Verbatim

Higher education in a global market has a business aspect to it in which communication is important, as in any other industry. But it's not the main point. The real stake is an institution's identity. A good communication does not have to bring new student applications to a school but the right positioning, from which the right applications will then stem.

Prof. Guido TABELLINI

Rector, Bocconi University

Communication is a key element in realising the strategy of a school, sharing the newest insights and latest knowledge with students and business leaders alike. Communication helps a school to attain higher levels of excellence by emphasizing the link between research and business, which is key in branding the school. Without business impact, there are no internships, no company lectures, no recruiters and no funding, just to name a few. This bond is the lynchpin of the "critical thought and practical action" of the RSM approach.

George YIP

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Why Publish a White Paper on Communications in Higher Education ?

Above all, to respond to the concerns of the growing number of people involved – deans, university presidents, directors of business schools, press officers, professors, directors of organizations... As it stands, most of them are already aware of the absolute necessity for communications. They know their institutions can no longer remain sequestered in ivory towers, separate from society, enveloped in a purely academic mindset – as they have so long been. They all understand that the best thing to do is publicize the uniqueness and strengths of their institutions. Whether it is to attract students (particularly from abroad), to recruit professors, to collaborate with companies, to raise funds, to mobilize alumni, or even to attract the attention of the general public...

There is a simple reason for this: higher education has entered the era of competition. And the playing field can be local, national, or international. Everywhere, communication is necessary if a school wants to stay in the race, to stand out, to be visible and regarded positively. Academic excellence alone is no longer enough: one also needs to "get the message out." This means implementing an effective, professional communications plan.

A Difficult Exercise

At the same time, those involved also sense that this is an increasingly difficult assignment. Communication is imperative, yes, but about what? Where to begin? When? How often? Who is the audience? And what is it going to cost? What will be the return on investment? These are the questions that most people in higher education are asking and to which there are as yet no easy answers. Add to this the many factors that complicate matters even further: the digital revolution, the crisis of the press industry's economic model, the arrival on the scene of new players and new tools...

In addition to all this, there are the challenges specific to higher education. First of all, the audience is very diverse: students, of course, but also professors, executives, company directors as well as the general public... Plus, thanks to globalization, they are spread out all over the world. As for the media industry, it is also increasingly diverse in nature: there are the traditional media (written press, radio, television, posters, etc.), but also student newspapers, websites, blogs, online publications, social networks...

A Very Demanding Audience

Finally, the target audience is at once demanding and fickle. On the one hand, students are one of the most difficult audiences to target: they are hyper-informed, their attention is easily diverted, they are critical and experts at recognizing double talk and platitudes. Highly conversant with the new technologies, they exist in the universe of mobile communication (cell phones, text messaging, MP3 files, smartphones, netbooks) and the interactive Web. They also rely heavily on buzz, "e-reputation," word of mouth, and social networks. Finally, they are pas-

The Three Eras of Communications

The history of communications in higher education is a recent one. Indeed, for a long time, schools and universities existed in their own world, disconnected from the concerns and constraints of the rest of society.

In this recent history, there are, however, three distinct periods:

1. « The Bronze Age » or the Pioneer Era

The need to do a better job of getting their message out became clear to universities in the United States as soon as institutions began to compete with each other. To attract students and professors and to raise funds, there was a need to refine and promote an image of excellence. So in the 1960s, Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, MIT and other major American universities created departments for this purpose. European universities were slower to adopt this approach. Little by little, European business schools, then universities, created communications departments. At this stage, this meant publishing a booklet that described all of their activities, maintaining basic press relations (internal and external) and buying some advertising space in newspapers. Things changed when newspapers began to show more interest in higher education. Many of them began publishing regular supplements dedicated to higher education and graduate employment.

2. The Web Era

By making it possible to access information anytime and anywhere, the Internet served as an extraordinary facilitator and accelerator. This is even truer for higher education than other sectors. So every institution created a website, some of which were more or less robust, more or less user-friendly than others. But the content was limited: programmes offered, a word from the director or dean, a few pictures of the campus and/or students, sometimes some interactive elements...

3. Communications Today : Web 2.0, Video, Blogs and Social Networks

There was yet another change of course, beginning in 2005-2006, with the rise of Web 2.0, which brought with it significant interactivity. Websites were enriched with chat rooms, forums, blogs, and plenty of videos. This is also the era of social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). Communication is no longer the exclusive domain of specialized departments: everyone can have a finger in the pie. Furthermore, these days, communication encompasses the many ways in which an institution can express itself (and be addressed): brand management, publishing, design, press relations, direct marketing, events, internal communication, press monitoring... Participative, interactive, multi-channel, integrated, omnipresent: that is communications in higher education today.

sionate about movies, video games, special effects, music, elliptical editing. So there is no point in trying to capture this audience with tools from Gutenberg's day, or generic PowerPoint presentations.

On the other hand, there is a skeptical academic mindset regarding the issues and methods of communication. Many professors, and even administrators, still think that communicating beyond the academic sphere is as risky as it is superfluous – and that their message would be lost on the average person.

Some decision-makers in higher education see it essentially as a waste of time. Many tend to believe that hearing the name of their institution alone should be enough to attract students and generate enthusiasm. "We are excellent and everyone knows it, so we don't need to advertise the fact." This argument works, at best, for a handful of institutions in the world, but for the majority of them, this approach is simply out of the question. So when communication becomes necessary, it can be quite a challenge for those institutions that are still unprepared. What's more, they have all witnessed the embarrassment, awkwardness and outright blunders which have occurred in this domain. These are mistakes that can be costly.

From Novices to Seasoned Communicators

It is true that not everyone is at the same level. There are enormous disparities among institutions when it comes to communications. Although some – notably in the United States, Great Britain and Spain – developed highly professional communications activities long ago, others are still at square one. The veterans know how to get the most out of modern communications tools and therefore have a significant advantage in terms of image, status and a coherent strategy... The novices are still at the starting line and among them there are clearly some who could be called amateurs. And this is not simply a question of size or budget. Certain institutions with limited staff are very good at this game while others, despite having considerable means, can barely keep up.

Beyond the Norm

That said, in the following pages we do not offer a secret recipe or a plug-and-play solution that will enable an institution to design and implement a communications strategy. Communication is not that simple. In reality, this white paper serves three purposes:

- Our first objective is to sensitize decision-makers in higher education (deans, presidents, professors, department heads, communications directors, as well as governing authorities) to communications issues. To make them aware that communication is essential.
- Secondly, we wish to provide an appraisal of the state of communications in universities and business schools. Examine the various facets of communications – from direct marketing to press relations, from branding to crisis communications. Take stock of the main changes and trends going on today in this area, but also identify best practices for tomorrow. And, by doing so, explore all of this from the unique perspective of higher education. As far as we know, this paper is the first to take this approach.
- Finally, this white paper can be used to kindle a debate among the different players in communications on the topics of the profession and its future. A way to contribute to the advancement of a sector whose strategic importance is increasing.

In these areas, the Noir sur Blanc agency, which provides support to many institutions on every continent, has a legitimate claim as experts.

Chapter 1

THE NEW FACE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

"The higher education landscape is changing rapidly, because of globalization and the continued growth in demand for educational training in the world. Between 2000 and 2015 the number of students in the world will increase from 100 to 200 million, 70 million of which will come from Asia. This creates huge opportunities, but also global competition between institutions, all of which are trying to distinguish themselves through signs of excellence. French grandes écoles, by balancing both theory and practice, and by their competitive level of selection, represent a unique model, one that is being noticed on a global scale. It allows for an exceptional potential for international development because we are educating students who are particularly unique."

Pierre TAPIE

Director, ESSEC Business School
President, *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*

Few sectors of activity have experienced a transformation as rapid and radical as that of higher education. In just a few years, the stakes have changed; there are new players and new issues. Now business schools and universities play an essential role in our society. They are no longer simply centres of knowledge-production: they are among the keys to innovation, economic development, transmission of ideas, and even territorial planning. In short, it's a whole new game. And that affects the way institutions communicate.

What are the main elements of this transformation?

The International Dimension

This is the most striking change of all. In the space of a few decades, universities and business schools have extended their boundaries. Of course, they can't all compete directly with Harvard, Cambridge, or MIT. But even the most modest of them can now "craft" a strategy and incorporate the international dimension into the way they operate. They are recruiting more and more international students. They are hiring international faculty. Their course offerings are reflecting a more "global" view of the world. And they are being scrutinized by international organizations responsible for accreditation and rankings. Graduates, for their part, are increasingly likely to end up on other continents. And this is true for all disciplines: management, engineering, but also medicine, humanities, law, etc.

The change is particularly marked for the most prestigious universities; their playing field is the world, and their competitors operate on a global scale.

The higher education boom in emerging countries is further proof of the trend towards internationalization. China alone is training half of the world's engineers. The appearance of the Shanghai ranking, the construction of vast campuses in the Middle East (Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi), the organization of international fairs dedicated to education (GETEX in Dubai and the Kingdom of Bahrain), MBA and Masters fairs, etc.), new, high-calibre business schools in Russia, India and Brazil, all illustrate this phenomenon.

We are seeing simplification in the nature and format of educational programmes. For example, the rise of the LMD (license, master, doctorat), the equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral degrees, which is a reform of the degree structure in higher education and part of the Bologna Process, is rising in Europe. This reform and the MBA boom on all continents are a response to the need for curricula that are easily recognized – and comparable – throughout the world.

Strong Local Roots

Universities and business schools must also strengthen their ties with their surrounding economic environment – companies, local communities, organizations... Among other things, institutions play a key role in science and technology parks, business clusters, university and research clusters and other development activities. They are becoming major players in their local communities. In other words, they must think in local, as well as global terms.

Close Ties with Businesses

There are many reasons for higher education to reach out to the business community. Companies are the obvious next step for graduates, of course. They can be a source of research contracts and various types of funding (chairs, endowments, paid training, etc.) for colleges and universities. They can also provide insight into their industries and the qualifications they seek in personnel. In addition, it is becoming more common for businesses to serve on the boards of higher educational institutions. They also participate in devising strategy and designing programmes.

In turn, colleges and universities are sources of knowledge for businesses, at a time when the business environment is becoming more complex. In short, the partnership between the two is growing stronger.

The Era of Competition

Today, promising young students can choose to spend part of their college years anywhere in the world: in Singapore, in California or the United Kingdom, in Australia or Brazil. Because of this, there is increasingly fierce competition among institutions throughout the world to attract the best students. The same holds true for research professors. There is even competition among schools with different missions: a business school can offer an engineering programme in order to draw the best and brightest.

Thus, institutions are committed to excellence at every level – core academics as well as continuing education, research and even ancillary activities, such as graduate placement.

Whether we like it or not, higher education has become a global market – particularly for management and the sciences. Although this change brings with it costs and risks, it would be difficult to ignore the trend without running the risk of being completely marginalized.

A Delicate Financial Balance

The growing power of higher education calls for bigger budgets. Universities and business schools must, among other things, improve their academic quality, which means recruiting new professors (often at a high price), invest ever more in research, provide world-class facilities, and have excellent equipment (computer networks, for example). And they have to accept more and more students. Finally, they must offer scholarships to disadvantaged students and to those who are the most outstanding.

How to fund all of this? Governments and local communities, especially in this period of crisis, are cutting back on investments. Do they raise tuition fees? This would be an option for some institutions, like public universities, but practically unthinkable for others. Research contracts and continuing education can only bring in so much revenue. Increasingly, universities and business schools, like Anglo-Saxon institutions, are turning to businesses, alumni and even individuals. Today the fundraising model is increasingly common throughout the world.

Time for Evaluation

Universities and business schools are continually evaluated. It is a competitive necessity. There are two types of evaluation:

- **Accreditation.** This is managed by international organizations such as the EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development), the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and AMBA (Association of MBAs), in the management discipline. But there are also national accreditation entities that ensure that institutions meet certain criteria. The ACICS (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools) in the United States figures amongst these national, or principally national, certifying bodies. In the United Kingdom, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) safeguards qualities and standards in UK higher Ed. In France, the CTI (Commission des titres d'ingénieur), the AERES (Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur) and the Helfer Commission, for business schools, are some of the accreditation entities. The FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation) awards accreditations in German-speaking countries. In Russia, the business schools programs are accredited by the Russian Association of Business Education (RABE).
- **Rankings.** On the international level, rankings are published by various newspapers, such as the Financial Times and Business Week, or by institutions like Shanghai Jiao Tong University. A project for ranking European institutions is under consideration. There are also national-level rankings in most countries with developed higher education systems. Universities and colleges attach great importance to accreditations and rankings.

Multiple Activities

There is no question that universities and business schools exist to educate students and produce knowledge. But today they must take on much more than this dual mission. They must also juggle attracting quality students, ensuring that their graduates can find work, recruiting professors, establishing relationships with businesses, raising funds, preparing materials for accreditation and rankings, enhancing their research activities, and mobilizing their alumni... And, of course, communicating – both internally and externally. All of these activities are outside the sphere of an institution's core mission, and they all require dedicated teams – and budgets. As a result, universities and colleges are becoming complex, multi-purpose entities.

A Vast Ecosystem

Higher education has long kept itself cloistered, but the time for this is past. The first groups to which institutions need to reach out are, obviously, the governing authorities (public authorities, local communities, chambers of commerce) and, to an increasing extent, businesses. But that's not all. Higher educational institutions these days are at the core of a distinct ecosystem, which is comprised of increasingly diverse and specialized groups. Professional organizations (unions, executives' clubs, HR managers' networks) accreditation bodies, newspapers, websites and blogs dedicated to education, alumni associations, consulting companies, communications agencies, secondary educational institutions, fundraising specialists, organizers of recruitment fairs, publishers, career counselling departments, advertising agencies, research optimization specialists... These are some of higher education's regular partners and service providers.

A Time for Alliances

Today, every institution builds its own network, which can take many forms – from basic student exchange agreements to important strategic alliances. And many of these networks are international. In recent years, some institutions have also been acquired by other entities. But the ultimate make-up of higher education remains to be seen.

The Challenge of Communications

Faced with all of this upheaval, higher education institutions find themselves playing a high-stakes game. There are intellectual and scientific issues. Wide-reaching and pertinent issues. Even economic and geopolitical issues. It is on university campuses that the future of society is taking shape and the role of universities and business schools in the knowledge economy has given them a new status. But with this status come obligations. Given the strategically important position they occupy in society, universities and business schools owe it to themselves to implement a communications system that is "up to scratch." In other words, one that is professional and in step with the times. In such a competitive context, managing the brand of an institution and communicating its strategy requires very sophisticated management.

Using the tools of yesteryear is no longer an option. Students and professors are among those who use the Web, social networks and multimedia tools the most. So these are the tools that must be used to reach this audience – and to persuade them.

The Birth of the Knowledge Society

"Making Europe the most competitive knowledge society in the world": this goal, presented by EU authorities in Lisbon, in 2000, is far from being attained – but it is an ongoing effort. In the United States, although less explicitly stated, the goal is similar. It is clear that America expects its universities and business schools to retain their positions in the worldwide competition. China and India have serious ambitions in this area as well. Even a small country like Qatar decided to invest heavily in higher education with the riches from hydrocarbons. Everywhere in the world, the "knowledge economy" is on the agenda. And higher education is unquestionably a critical element.

Chapitre 2

COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGY

“ Tomorrow's successful organizations will be those that know how to combine strategy, execution, client focus and communication. As the business world continues to globalize, new communication tools are providing unprecedented ways for firms and individuals to engage and connect with each other in more open and collaborative ways. Communication is becoming a more powerful vehicle for creating value for both companies and society. ”

Jordi CANALS

Dean, IESE Business School

In many countries, apparently, there is still a lack of understanding when it comes to communications and higher education. Even a general feeling of disdain. Many of those involved in higher education, some quite distinguished, see it as superfluous and a pointless expense. Communication is not something that comes naturally to them. Others who are slightly more motivated tend to think that all they need to do to nurture their image is appear in the media from time to time. Their communications plans often consist of choosing where to place their ads, or giving the occasional interview to the press. Their communications budgets boil down to a few "expenses" for publishing a brochure, or buying advertising space. Whereas experience shows that an evolved approach — one that is adapted to the new order of higher education, as are the approaches of certain Anglo-Saxon universities — is the polar opposite of these practices. If institutions in the United States, Europe and even Asia manage to make headway while others languish, it is not merely a question of academic excellence; it is also because they have implemented effective communications strategies. Once again, there is not a single entity (business, government, NGO, organization, etc.) today that can get by without communications. And that alone, even when done well, is not enough. It is also necessary to get the message out, explain what the institution does, work on positioning, identity, and the brand. We are living in an era of communications and everyone must play the game to get along. That's how an institution gets results. Excellent communication is also a way to stand out in the increasingly competitive world of higher education.

A Reflection of Identity

But the desire to communicate alone is not enough. One also needs to know what to communicate, and how, because communications procedures are not something that can just be tacked on to existing procedures without making some changes. On the contrary, a communications approach is a reflection of the reality, the identity and the vision of an institution. It must relay and express a strategic position. And not just selectively, or occasionally; it has to be ongoing and permanent. Better yet, a communications strategy must constantly challenge, stimulate and even advance a positioning. And as a result, it should strengthen and promote the institution's brand. In short, communications and strategy are closely linked. But how can one come up with an effective communications policy without understanding the institution and where it is headed? One cannot communicate in a hit or miss way or only if there is a budget available.

Adopt a Strategy

It may seem like this is stating the obvious. But the truth of the matter is that many universities and schools, even the most prestigious ones, do not have a real, clearly defined strategy. "Be one of the best," "move up in the rankings," "train tomorrow's leaders" – statements like these, often made by leaders in higher education, do not constitute a strategic vision. A higher education institution owes it to itself to have a long-term vision, one that is understood and acknowledged by all concerned parties, both internally and externally.

Let's take this a step further. The main point of communication, the primary benefit, is precisely that it forces the institution to examine its own image, its competitive positioning, its strengths and weaknesses, its rate of development, and the risks involved... In other words, to come up with a strategy. For those who want to stand out in the current context, it is a major element that cannot be ignored.

The Connection with the Administration

To put this into practice, there are three requirements.

First, a university or school that wants to implement a communications plan must absolutely hire a manager to handle internal and external communications, and he or she should be recognized at the highest level of the administration. The director of communications must be truly responsible for communications, and not just practical tasks, such as having brochures made, organizing conferences, etc. This is not always the case.

Second, the director of communications must work closely with whoever is in charge of the institution's strategy – in other words, the office of the president or executive director. He or she must also be directly linked to the administration in the hierarchy and even, if possible, be physically located in close proximity to these offices. This hierarchical/physical proximity encourages an ongoing dialogue between the two offices, which is essential.

Finally, the director of communications must be organized and professional. In communications, one cannot settle for a simplistic, piecemeal approach that relies only on the academic quality of the institution and the occasional interaction with the press.

Therefore, this individual must be a high-level specialist, someone with a deep understanding of the field and its complexities, someone who can be objective. Too often, the responsibility for communications is given to managers or professors who undoubtedly mean well, but who are learning as they go along. This explains their lack of strategic vision... and their trial-and-error methods.

The director of communications must, of course, have an appropriate operating budget, staff that have the necessary expertise and the latest tools and methods.

A Growing List of Responsibilities

The tasks handled by a director of communication are increasing in number and variety. In general, it is up to this director to devise and implement all elements of the institution's communications policy – which is derived from its strategy. The director advises the administration on issues requiring that the institution take a position, as well as on the institution's image and brand, both internally and externally.

In more concrete terms, this includes:

- managing design, graphic style, and visual identity;
- creating brochures, booklets and various documents;
- overseeing the content, update of the website, which is the main window to the institution;
- organizing and participating in events (colloquia, conferences, forums, open house days, student competitions, anniversaries, partnerships, launching of new programmes, etc.);
- managing press relations (ranking strategy);
- organizing advertising campaigns (press, posters, etc.);
- publishing studies or surveys;
- assuming marketing responsibilities for the institution – to include targeting students and businesses;
- managing and distributing external newsletters;
- co-publishing documents;
- arranging for publicity ops for the institution (photo and video), as well as their distribution;
- ensuring that blogs, forums, social networks, and communities are monitored;
- devising a crisis communications procedure;
- managing the creation and sale of logo merchandise;
- mobilizing internal networks (alumni, professors, student organizations, etc.);
- ensuring consistency of the message coming from different parts of the institution (administration, departments, professors, organizations, students, etc.); updating the intranet and internal communications tools.

Furthermore, the scope of responsibility can vary considerably from one institution to another. Marketing, direct marketing, student recruitment, and relations with the business community, for example, may or may not be among the communications director's responsibilities. In some cases, the communications director may be in charge of partnerships, or even the search for outside funding and fundraising policies. Designed and organized in this way, communications can not only improve the image of an institution, but can also lead to an actual improvement in its operations and general betterment.

Throughout the world, it is the major business schools that are the most advanced in this area. But in Anglo-Saxon countries, many "multi-disciplinary" universities, as well as those that are specialized, have also embarked on this path. Examples include the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and some art schools, such as Savannah College of Arts and Design Home. University reform could, however, be the catalyst for raising awareness of the importance of effective communications.

The Targets

High school students and potential students for the various programmes are naturally the first group that communications activities seek to target. But there are many others... Who should be targeted? Who is the audience, within and outside of the institution? It is impossible to devise an effective communications strategy without clear answers to these questions. And this is also one of the biggest challenges: universities and business schools must direct their communications at a public that is particularly heterogeneous.

Internal communications:

- students (individually);
- student organizations;
- professors;
- all staff (including administrative);
- alumni and their organizations.

External communications:

- prospective students, including abroad;
- parents of students. They participate in decisions about career choice and the college or university to attend – particularly for undergraduates;
- teachers and decision-makers in secondary education. They play an important role as advisors to their students, who are the future candidates.
- the press, traditional media;
- "new" media, particularly online media: general or specialized sites, blogs, forums, etc;
- businesses (local, national, international): executive management, HR management, campus managers, alumni, even employees.

The Director of Communications Profession

It's getting more interesting and exciting all the time. When they talk about how their career field is evolving, communications directors in higher education are generally enthusiastic. Their strategic role is now acknowledged, and their missions are increasingly varied. They are enthusiastic, yes, but also a little overwhelmed by the extent of the work. The Director of Communications stands, for all intents and purposes, at the crossroads through which all information about the institution flows. There is always more of it, and it is more and more complex. The Director of Communications is the interface between the administration and the rest of the institution, and the link to the outside world. Directors of Communications must devise the communications policy of the university or school and be involved in the creation of its brand, but they must also be constantly aware of what's going on; as informed about the activities of students and faculty as they are about what the competition is up to; they must know as much about new communications trends as they do about the buzz surrounding the institution. And, of course, they have to manage their teams. It is a multi-faceted field, advising on and also implementing communications activities. And there are many of these: management, design, publishing, press monitoring... The director of communications is like the conductor of an orchestra. He or she must be constantly aware of what is going on outside of the institution.

The Director of Communications must not only produce information but also collect it. With Web 2.0 and mobile tools, every member of the educational community (students, faculty) can, in fact, participate in communications. Information circulates in both directions – from and into the university. The Director of Communications must monitor what is being said on social networks. In addition, good relationships – internal as well as external, with the media as with the faculty – continue to play a very important role. There is practically no downtime in this profession: sensitive information – positive or negative, true or false – can come out at any time. It is imperative that an institution be ready to react very quickly to requests and events.

- professional organizations (such as unions);
- recruiting agencies or headhunters and their organizations;
- governing and public authorities at all levels: chambers of commerce, government, local communities...
- players in the local economic and political sphere;
- the academic community;
- research centres, scholarly publications;
- international accreditation bodies (EFMD, AACSB, AMBA, etc.);
- entities that establish rankings (newspapers, universities, etc.);
- the general public (in general terms, through social networks, specialized sites, handbooks, etc.).

And the list can be even longer, depending on the circumstances and situation... An additional difficulty: anyone in these groups is – or can become – a communicator, by contributing to blogs and social networks, for example. Every one of them, even on an individual level, can thus have an impact on the overall image and visibility of the institution. Plus, these groups can exhibit varying degrees of sensitivity, some are more demanding than others, some are more willing "consumers." Current and former MBA students, for example, have a vested interest in the image of their programmes. It is therefore important to be clearly understood by these different groups in order to avoid mixed messages, contradictions, or confusion. Some institutions do a good job of interacting with these groups separately – particularly on their websites. Certain sites, for example, guide users according to their profiles: prospective students, students, journalists, and even potential donors. The various groups sometimes have their own specific navigation options.

Outsourcing Communications

Given the diversity and complexity of their responsibilities, a growing number of communications directors in the world, notably in Anglo-Saxon countries, are choosing to outsource some of their work. These sub-contracted activities fall into two categories:

- guidance regarding communications strategy;
- more practical tasks, such as graphic design, web design, video production, printing, image surveys, audits, etc. Tasks may also include press relations, advertising, event planning, etc.

This option allows the communications director to avoid being spread too thin, to be more efficient and to concentrate on strategic issues, such as advising the administration and organizing communications activities. But no matter what the situation, the important thing is to find a consulting firm with real expertise that adds value, and to strike the right balance between the skills of in-house staff and outside consultants.

The Corporate Model

When it comes to communications, is the corporate model relevant? Can it be applied as is to the world of higher education? Only partially. There is no doubt that in terms of the professionalism of their communications departments, large corporations could teach universities and business schools a great deal. They have long understood the importance of communications and have reaped the benefits. Their budgets are large, and they have numerous employees and sophisticated tools...

However, the situation is quite different in higher education. The "target market" is considerably more diverse and fragmented than in the business world – which makes the communications process more complex. Students also use the Web, social networks and mobile tools extensively. As for budgets, companies and institutions of higher education are not even in the same league. It is estimated that large corporations spend between one and two percent of their income on communications activities. In higher education, it is closer to 0.1 to 0.2 %...

Professors: Voices of the Institution

Among the (many) communications options available to universities and business schools, there is one that is increasingly successful: having their professors and experts express themselves publicly.

Encouraging faculty to speak up outside of the classroom, to share their analyses of various topics with the general public is, in fact, the best way for an institution to highlight the excellence of its academic and research environments and to enhance the prestige of its faculty. And, in the long term, to make managers and executives want to attend a seminar there, to send their children to school there... or to contribute financially. In short, the idea of turning research professors into ambassadors or spokespersons for the institution is a very attractive one.

Professors could potentially contribute in the following ways:

- **Providing insight into current affairs** on "hot" or complex topics, such as penal code reform or a conflict in a distant country. They could respond to requests from journalists, or contact the press themselves to offer to contribute. Some of them could maintain blogs or forums;
- **Presenting a research summary** that might be of interest to the public. This could be done in collaboration with the communications department (via a press release, for example), or through a blog;
- **Giving a statement on the school's position** on a technological or societal issue. In recent months, many institutions throughout the world have called on their research professors, particularly those with expertise in finance, to deconstruct the economic crisis.
- **Offering a master class**, a kind of demonstration course, given to a specific audience on a topic chosen for its appeal. Naturally, this kind of event must be flawlessly organized: a high-quality reception for participants, a comfortable setting, clear audiovisual presentation, good sound... not to mention superior content.
- **Organizing a conference or colloquium**, like Bocconi University, which puts on an annual conference about the economy in which the faculty participates.

Flawless Organization

Implementing the ideas elaborated above is appealing, but in order to do so an institution must be appropriately organized. It must:

- come up with subjects that will interest the public – and therefore, the media;
- identify the professors who will best represent the institution. They must have certain qualities: they should be outstanding, good communicators (clear, concise, flexible, etc.) and they should be reachable or, in other words, "media friendly."

Staff and Budgets

From one institution to the next, the number of staff and the size of the budget for the communications department vary considerably. Here are some examples of staffing in universities and business schools:

- University Pierre and Marie Curie (Paris): 14
- Cass Business School: around 12
- Chicago Booth School of Business: 25
- Ecole Centrale Paris: 6 (not including fundraising)
- Bocconi University (Milan): 30
- INSEAD (Fontainebleau, Singapore and Abu Dhabi): around 35 (not including fundraising)
- HEC-Paris: 6 (corporate communications)

In general, these departments tend to grow steadily in order to keep up with online activities (blogs, forums, social networks, etc.). Few institutions are willing to reveal the size of their communications budgets, but by way of example, that of Cambridge University is approximately two million Euros and that of University Pierre and Marie Curie is around 400,000 Euros.

- publish or otherwise distribute a select list of experts who are "authorized" to talk to the media. This list can appear online; it can also be provided to journalists and include the professors' areas of expertise and contact information. The press relations department could also act as an intermediary. Cass Business School takes this a step further by publishing on its website a detailed profile of each professor that includes professional background, current research activities and e-mail addresses. These profiles contain details about funding (contracts and compensation) that the professors have received for their research.
- convince research professors to "get into the game" – not all of them want to.

It is worth noting that some institutions offer their professors media training sessions. It is often these professors who succeed in being regularly quoted in the press.

However, not many institutions are comfortable with – or willing to risk – expressing strong opinions on "societal" issues. But such an approach would allow them to place themselves at the heart of public debate, and give them the image among the academic population of being "committed" institutions, which would raise their status. In Europe, schools that have chosen this route include EDHEC, SDA Bocconi, and Cass Business School.

The United States at the Top

The trend is clear: everywhere in the world, communications activities in higher education are becoming more professional. This is made clear by a survey of 190 universities and schools in Europe, America and Asia conducted in 2006 by the Noir sur Blanc agency, and still applicable today.

But even as institutions professionalize, there is significant disparity depending on the country and the size of the institution. It is in North America, and in the Anglo-Saxon universities, that the process is the most developed.

In the United States, experience prevails: the director of communications is usually (in 67% of cases) a person between 45 and 55 years old, and 75% of these directors have held their positions for more than five years. It is also in the United States where the Directors of Communication have the most experience in communications – and they are also the best paid. These are all indications that the position, there more than elsewhere, is considered to be of strategic importance.

Staff and Budgets: Significant Disparity

Furthermore, 75% of communications departments in North America and Australia are directly linked to the dean or administration.

As for number of staff, there are considerable variations. Half of the communications departments employ no more than three staff, while 11% employ between 10 and 20, and 5.5% at least 20. A handful of departments in the most prestigious American institutions are made up of more than 30 employees. France is one of the countries with the fewest staff in communications departments – and their budgets are the smallest: three to four times less than in the United States or Great Britain.

It should be noted that a significant majority (87%) of institutions in the world turn to outside service providers – regularly or occasionally. This percentage increases when the institution decides to implement an international communications strategy.

What are the main objectives of these communications departments? Generally speaking, they seek to reach potential students, to develop their corporate communications strategy, to reinforce their institutions' national and international visibility, to develop relations with the press and the public. Many North American institutions prioritize marketing in addition to these objectives.

Chapter 3

REFINE THE IMAGE, STRENGTHEN THE BRAND

"A brand is a living system, not something virtual. In a competitive, globalized environment building one's brand identity is a strategic asset for a school. The brand relies on the school's concrete products and services, which must have the best possible visibility. The recognition of professors, student selectivity, recruiter satisfaction and the success of graduates... the brand must be able to meet everyone's aspirations."

Bernard RAMANANTSOA

Director, HEC-Paris

Attracting attention, arousing interest or curiosity, creating buzz, being a topic of conversation, crafting an image, and reinforcing status... All of this is essential in the increasingly competitive higher educational environment. And it all involves having an active communications policy that is applied internally as well as externally.

But how does one undertake such a task? Where to begin? On which issues should a stand be taken? This white paper is not intended to be a step-by-step guide, but rather to highlight certain key elements and necessary stages, which we at the Noir sur Blanc agency have gathered from experience.

First, a rule of thumb: in higher education, as in other sectors, the worst thing one can do is have a catch-as-catch-can approach. Nothing is more counterproductive than throwing together an image in two weeks, only to change it six months later – for example when a school gets a new dean or director. It is utterly useless to be in the media spotlight at one moment, only to disappear from sight for months. The one-shot policy is to be avoided. A university or school that wants to strengthen its communications must focus its approach on the long term.

The first step towards effective communications is not just to throw everything at the problem, but to take the time to reflect. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institution, its main characteristics, its centres of excellence and its rate of development. To analyze, in detail, its positioning and what distinguishes it from the competition. In other words, everything that makes it stand out. Only by embarking on such a voyage of self-discovery and introspection can one devise a strategy and define a communications policy that corresponds with one's strategy.

A. The Fundamentals

For the rest, the basic, essential principles for communications can be applied as easily to a university as to a school. Here, again, are just a few:

1. Think Long Term

Change is slow to come about in communications. To craft an image one needs time, more time, patience and repetition... For this reason it is best to be sure of the strategy, and to avoid constantly changing course. If changes are required, it is best to do so gradually, rather than suddenly.

2. Stress strengths

It is even more important to have clearly identified them – and to know if they will add lasting value. There is no point in communicating about an attribute that is of no interest, or one that the competition also has. In order to avoid this, one should have a system for monitoring the competition, perform regular benchmark assessments and analyze social trends... as well as student expectations.

3. Offer Something Meaningful

One must try, both beyond the institution and within it, to offer a compelling programme that emphasizes values. This reinforces the attractiveness of the institution in the eyes of potential students and stimulates internal cohesion (among professors, students, and all personnel).

B. Refining One's Image

Beyond the fundamentals, there are many ways for a university or school to rise on the national or international stage.

1. Focus on the difference

Except in cases – which are rare indeed – where an institution is an uncontested leader, the most effective approach, and the easiest one to implement, is to draw attention to what makes the institution different. What makes the university or school unique? What does it do more of, or better than the competition? Indeed, the best case scenario is having something to offer that no one else has. Although for many institutions, strangely, the goal is to imitate others. Conforming, like "good students," rather than strongly asserting their own personalities.

Everything that expresses and emphasizes the difference, uniqueness, originality of the institution can be capitalized on: specialization in a discipline in which the competition is weak, placing the accent on one kind of programme or another, a prestigious partnership, innovative collaborations, teaching methods, programme organization... These are all opportunities to stand out from the crowd.

To stress their uniqueness, some institutions go so far as to completely redesign their programme offerings. For example, Ball State University in the United States redefined its courses – and its communications – in 2006 in order to emphasize its particular strong point, "immersive learning."

But be careful not to take this too far. Changes like these need to be based on positioning and strategy. And they must take the institution in a positive direction. Originality is a good thing, but not at any cost. It has to make sense. And the differentiation strategy must be the result of an intensive analysis of the competition and their strategies.

2. Innovate

This is another card a school can play to boost its image. Innovative, modern, daring: all distinctive traits that are positively perceived. And ways for an institution to show that it is "with it" and in touch with the times. Using new technologies is an excellent option for communications, especially to reach students. Many businesses and academic institutions rushed into the virtual world Second Life in 2007 and 2008. Businesses saw it as an opportunity to come across as ultra-hip, and universities as a way to create a virtual presence. Since then, the hype around Second Life has lost momentum.

3. Be dynamic

Organizing regular events and publicizing various projects and announcements can make an institution seem active and dynamic, which will also be perceived in a positive light. It's also a way to stay in the media limelight. Be careful, however, not to give the impression of being too scattered or of not being able to "sit still."

4. Be sympathetic

This is yet another way to polish a school's image. An institution can go out of its way to show that it is responsible (environmentally, for example), supportive (of developing countries, or disadvantaged students, for example), and sincere...

5. Strive for excellence

In the academic world, a reputation for academic excellence is obviously a considerable advantage. But this is not an option for all institutions... Another negative: quality is not immediately evident.

Smaller Institutions

Not everyone can be Harvard or Oxford. In the intensely competitive environment of higher education, smaller institutions, which necessarily have less money, can nonetheless aspire to a certain status, even on an international level. That is, if they choose the "uniqueness" option – no point in going head-to-head with the most powerful institutions – and if they use good judgment (thus the importance of a well-conceived strategy). They also need to know how to express their uniqueness and get the message out. That's where communication comes into play.

Fundraising, Evaluation, Rankings: Opportunities to "Start from Scratch"

This is something many institutions have experienced: to self-examine, to clarify or define an identity and strategy, to bring an image into line with a communications plan, there is nothing like preparing to launch a fundraising campaign. Before approaching companies, alumni, students, or even individuals, it is essential to ask which elements should be emphasized, what arguments used, and above all, what the programme offering is about. Launching a fundraising campaign is the perfect time to really take stock. And to make adjustments to anything that is not exactly as it should be.

One can apply this same thinking during two other key moments in the life of an institution. During the international accreditation process (AACSB, EFMD, AMBA, etc.), to begin with: this requires assembling a very thorough portfolio to deliver to specialized organizations. In addition, one must submit a very detailed assessment, which includes the institution's mission. The ranking process also requires completing a questionnaire, which is often very detailed, and which also poses questions regarding budgets and key characteristics.

Fundraising campaigns, accreditation, ranking: in a sense, these "events" are both an opportunity for self-inspection and a catalyst for progress for the institution. Furthermore, in all three instances, the communications director is on the front line. And in all three situations, most of this work is internal.

C. Brand Building

With the increase in competition, the concept of branding has worked its way into higher education. Today, there are many who accept that a brand logic can inform the management, administration, and direction of a university, or a business school – just as it does for Sony, Dior, Coca-Cola, or Ferrari. A survey conducted in 2006 by Noir sur Blanc showed that 93% of administrators in higher education already considered their institution to be a brand.

But in many cases, this is really more wishful thinking than objective truth. In reality, only the larger institutions have adapted their communications policies to include the brand angle and integrated it into their strategies. Schools need more than a name, a little status and a lot of ambition to be a brand.

So what is a brand, really? It's a set of features of an organization, symbolized by a name which, if deftly managed, creates value and influence. Some of these attributes are easily identifiable: the name, logo, graphic style, colour... In other words, everything that is part of the visual identity and that is instantly recognized by the public.

A Competitive Advantage

But all of this is only the visible part of the iceberg that is a brand. A brand is also built on concrete characteristics: product (or programme) offering, price, market positioning relative to the competition, promotion policy... Add to this a selection of intangible elements, such as

status, attractiveness, perceived quality, emotional attachment and loyalty, reputation, image in the eyes of the audience, which may be large or small...

All of these things combined – external expression + market positioning + image – are what constitutes a brand and can fuel a kind of positive spiral for a company – or an institution. A strong brand will attract more clients (or students) and will even make it possible to raise prices (or tuition). It is, therefore, an important competitive advantage.

Clearly many of the basic ingredients of a brand, in one way or another, are already present in an institution of higher education. It is also clear that the fundamentals of brand management are the same in the academic world as they are in the world of consumer goods. But there are also very real differences between the two.

Higher Education: Another World

First of all, higher education is about service, rather than production. Universities deal in the intangible. Measuring quality, evaluation, performance, is much more complex and subtle.

And the price paid by the "consumer" – the tuition – often has little to do with the actual cost. This is not only because of the scholarship system, but also because it is difficult to establish an actual cost. Not to mention that profitability is not a priority, even though, as far as that is concerned, there are exceptions. Even the "client" concept is more complicated. Students are, in some ways, a university's clients, even though some deans, like those of Chicago Booth School of Business, offer an alternative view, stressing the student/professor relationship, for example. But the companies and government administrations that hire graduates and have some influence on academic content and organization are also clients. And one cannot ignore the obligation to society as a whole; a university is more than just a factory pumping out graduates and knowledge. It also plays a major societal role, and one that is increasingly recognized as such.

Therefore, although brand logic can be applied to higher education, it is nonetheless important to keep these differences in mind. Marketing a university or business school is both more delicate and more complex than marketing consumer goods.

Looking at it in this way, how does an institution create a brand in the world of higher education? How is it launched? There are a few things worth emphasizing.

1. A brand doesn't announce its own presence. This is even truer for higher education than other sectors. It requires **patient and rigorous effort**. Timing can be a decisive factor. The brand image of a university or college, on the other hand, can be quickly damaged due to a crisis or miscommunication. A mediocre ranking, for example, is not catastrophic, but a series of low rankings can do long-term damage to the image.

2. As in any service industry, it is very important to **keep promises**, particularly when it comes to the quality of the education provided. A brand image that is clear and regularly reinforced through communications is not enough. An institution must also have a set-up conducive to maintaining and improving quality.

A school must also **demonstrate** that it is making progress. A task made more difficult because students are not an easy population to persuade. They don't buy lip service. The institution's communications must constantly be underpinned by facts, data, and irrefutable evidence: rankings, accreditations, applicant data (number and quality), recruitment of professors, placement of graduates, agreements with prestigious partners, media presence... Basically anything that demonstrates the quality, as the excellence of the institution helps craft and strengthens its brand.

3. It is essential to **ensure consistency** among positioning, identity, strategy, stated goals, communications... All of these must be in line; all must work in concert to promote the same image.

It is also important to carefully monitor the consistency not only of the messages expressed by the communications department, but also those of the professors, students, governing authorities... They must all **speak with the same voice**. The role of the communications director is to coordinate and orchestrate the way in which the brand is expressed. It is not uncommon to hear a university president say the exact opposite of something the Director of Communications said. Or to reveal offhand something that should have remained confidential. This is a recipe for confusion.

Along the same lines, it is best not to be too scattered. Many institutions want to cover every market at once and meet everyone's expectations. They do not manage to pinpoint their positioning or to eliminate or exclude certain specialties.

Focus Quebec Universities Rework Their Image

"Study in Quebec. And live the difference." This is the key message of the new brand image of the 18 universities in Quebec, created for purposes of international recruitment. During the Conference of Rectors and Principals of Quebec Universities (CREPUQ) in early 2009, they decided to develop a common strategy. Decision-makers said, "In the past, every institution came up with its own messages in a very disparate way. We wanted to be more professional."

To do this, they hired a communications agency to design the new image of CREPUQ. They called on a team of professors and decision-makers from the network, all volunteers. Different approaches were then tested on a sampling of international students.

Since then, the campaign and its slogan are being promoted in a variety of ways: booklets and brochures, t-shirts, stickers, flyers... They are also visible on a website (in four languages) that was designed to be a virtual recruiting office. The site also features a blog on which international students can express their impressions of university life in Quebec.

4. There are many ways, some more ambitious than others, to contribute to the growth of a brand. Here are three:

- Mobilizing the **alumni network**, for example, is feasible and not difficult. The alumni of a college or university are its best ambassadors. And better yet, they are volunteers. Although in some cases they are paid, since many of them participate in fundraising campaigns.
- On another level, **merchandising** helps promote the brand. In this area, the possibilities are endless: clothing, t-shirts, pens, watches, pyjamas, baby bottles, various gadgets, even furniture – armchairs bearing the symbol of Harvard or other major American universities are very popular. The added bonus is that this merchandise generates income for the institution. Possessing these items creates an emotional tie to the school and generates recognition.
- Finally, **event organization** is a good way to mobilize the school or university community and strengthen the brand. There are plenty of opportunities: announcing an important agreement, launching a new programme, organizing a conference, gala, or forum for students and businesses, celebrating an anniversary, planning a graduation ceremony... The goal is to attract attention, preferably at regular intervals, to foster team spirit, and to create buzz.

The Sorbonne: Unfulfilled Brand Potential

Its name is known the world over, and it is one of the most famous universities on the planet. Founded in 1257, under King Louis IX (Saint Louis), the Sorbonne is the archetype of a venerable and powerful brand in higher education. According to experts, the Sorbonne brand is worth a fortune – some estimate more than a billion Euros. But this asset has lost some value. Today, the prestigious Parisian institution is made up of at least three universities (Paris 1, Paris 3, and Paris 4), each with a different emphasis. It even has three logos... The end result is a completely muddled image, particularly abroad. And the strikes of spring, 2009, further chipped away at the brand image of the Sorbonne...

Chapter 4

COMMUNICATIONS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

"Most of the world's top business schools are familiar with the US market, advanced economy and modern enterprises. But few of them have an equal understanding of the Chinese market, emerging economy and State-owned enterprises. I think that is where our opportunities are."

Xiang BING
Founding Dean, Cheung Kong GSB

How should universities and business schools handle communications in the era of globalization? The approach will not be the same in London and Beijing, in Paris, Chicago, or Delhi. Students everywhere do not always have the same attitude towards universities and colleges. Neither do the media.

However, it is true that globalization tends to create standards in behaviour in the same way that degrees are being standardized: the LMD is now accepted in all of Europe, the MBA, the world over. Yes, the Web gives constant access to future students or professors on the other side of the planet. But nonetheless, every country has its own habits, customs, business practices, culture. Plus, some countries that have a reputation for openness in the world are, in reality, not as free as one might imagine.

So an institution that hopes to show up on the international radar must take these differences into account when communicating – without, however, losing sight of its own identity and roots. It must think in global, as well as local terms. Or, as they say, "glocal." Being able to navigate this intercultural soup requires solid experience and an appropriate strategy.

English: Unavoidable, But Not Always Enough

Premier First off, the language issue. Of course, English is unavoidable. It is the ideal language for conducting business internationally. But it is not always enough. In many countries, English is still not widely mastered, in either academic or media circles. It is always preferable to speak (and write) the language of the country where the institution wants to have a presence or recruit. It is also a way to access those with whom the school interacts, to show

them respect, and to attract them. A growing number of institutions publish their sites in multiple languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, even Portuguese...

But the language issue is only the first step towards taking an intercultural approach. The real issue is implementing strategies that are appropriate for the different target countries. In other words, communications must be adapted to the customs, expectations, and uniqueness of the other culture. It must take these differences into account.

This presupposes an understanding of the local higher education market:

- how higher education is organized, its relationship with the public authorities and the economy;
- which local media are interested in business education, their work methods, preferred topics (practical subjects, select information, general overviews, trends, etc.);
- preferred media channels.

When Chinese Universities Communicate... In China

Even in a country where higher education opened up as recently as it did, the communications strategies of Chinese universities differ markedly from one to the next. Here are three examples:

- **Tsinghua University**, considered to be the best Chinese university, does not promote its programmes nor the events that it organizes. Student recruitment is based on a single criterion: the results of the national post-baccalaureate competition. On the other hand, the School of Economics and Management of Tsinghua University, with its MBA and executive education programmes, is actively competing on the market. It has signed agreements with the best institutions in the world, such as HEC-Paris and MIT. But the Tsinghua name has so much prestige in China that brand promotion practically takes care of itself within the country.

- **The Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business**, created in 2002 by the foundation of billionaire Li Ka-Shing, is considered one of the best business schools in China today. It aspires to be among the top 10 in the world by 2012. The dean and spokesperson, Xiang Bin, appears frequently in the press and on television in China and elsewhere in the world, where he gives lectures. This strategy draws many professors from prestigious institutions, such as Wharton, Stanford, INSEAD, NYU, and Yale, to Cheung Kong every year. Plus, Cheung Kong widely publicizes the fact that well-known Chinese businessmen participate in its executive programmes, which encourages other ambitious entrepreneurs to attend. Little by little, Cheung Kong is building the most powerful alumni network in the country.

- **CEIBS** (China European International Business School) of Shanghai, created in 1994, is a collaborative effort between the Chinese government and the European Union. Ranked among the top 25 in the world today, it is considered one of the best business schools in Asia. It regularly organizes forums, seminars and conferences. These events contribute to its growing status. The school also publishes a magazine in Mandarin entitled "CEIBS Business Review," which contains high-quality research articles.

Understanding Business Practices

One must also know the customs and habits of the country:

- social and political current events;
- negotiation customs (bargaining, for example, or bribery);
- business practices;
- attitudes towards schedules (strict or flexible);
- customs of protocol, courtesy, etiquette;
- codes (clothing, gestures, etc.).

To accomplish this, a school can put in place a mechanism for gathering information, work with an in-country go-between who is well versed in the local customs and understands the implicit messages (such as gestures), or work with a variety of professionals from the target countries. Still, it is difficult to do this for dozens of different locations, which is why it is advisable to target a few countries in order to create stronger ties.

No More Faux Pas. Tips When Communicating Internationally:

- **China** – Chinese first. When attending education fairs, always take brochures in both Chinese and English. Few parents of prospective students speak English and they expect the school to make the effort to communicate in their native language. The same goes for business cards. Adopt a Chinese name which reflects who you are and what you do and translate the school or business's name. Print the cards in Chinese on one side, English on the other.
- **North Africa/ Middle East** – Take into account religious differences. When planning a press conference in Morocco during Ramadan, for example, make sure to follow the rules and conventions of this holy month.
- **North America** – Less is more. When communicating in North America, press releases and pitches should be concise, informative and leave the journalist wanting more. The approach is more bare-bones than in some European countries in which press releases can be two pages long.
- **Russia** – Steer clear of criticism. Avoid communicating about political issues in Russia, or if you do, remain diplomatic, taking special care not to criticise politicians. Write texts, papers, and releases in Russian as few journalists speak English fluently.

Chapter 5

PRESS RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING

“ Communication acts as the vanguard in the implementation of a company’s strategy. Communication anticipates reality, like the messenger who anticipates a future event. Indeed, its contribution to the overall value of a company is very high and often neglected, given its intangible nature, but it is the unit that pulls the whole organisation towards the goals set by the general management. “

Santiago IÑIGUEZ
Dean, Instituto de Empresa

The two often go hand in hand. They are not, however, interchangeable. Press relations and advertising are, unquestionably, two preferred options that allow a university or school to reach audiences of various sizes, to raise its status, to establish and promote its brand. But the way they operate and how they are used are based on very different rules.

A. The New Scope of Press Relations

Relations with the press are an essential element of communications for business schools and universities. But it is a difficult domain to grasp – for at least two reasons.

First, the media are both very diverse and segmented. After all, a monthly publication on education, a general interest daily, a television channel for a general audience, and a specialized newsletter don't have much in common. And the diversity is increasing with the advent of new newspapers and other new media:

- free newspapers;
- websites (generalist or specialized), online newspapers, blogs...;
- Internet TV channels.

Plus, in many countries, media that specialize in higher education and careers are on the rise and appearing in many forms: specialized newsletters, supplements in dailies, dedicated websites, communications agencies, specific sections in the traditional press. Not to mention the Internet TV channels for students that are produced by press groups, universities, or students themselves.

First, Inform the Readers

It is important not to lose sight of the primary mission of the press, which is to inform its audience – and not to promote a particular institution or project. In this sense, the press is an instrument that serves democracy. But it is true that its original mission is sometimes obscured by its relations with advertisers... The third element to consider is the current severe crisis being experienced by the written press. This crisis is due to several factors: the competition of free newspapers, the Internet and, in a wider sense, audiovisual media, the decline of reading in many countries, and higher production costs. Add to this the current economic slump, which is having an effect on paid subscriptions as well as sources of advertising revenue.

This means the written press throughout the world is on the lookout for a new business model. They are turning to multimedia, the Internet, video, etc. and are cutting back on production and distribution. They are also establishing partnerships that are more appropriate for its current circumstances and are making an effort to improve access to certain content and articles.

The Decline of the Press

Does this mean we should expect the fall of the written press? It is not a certainty. History shows that no new media have ever replaced or eliminated those that came before, but that they always become intertwined, thus expanding the range of options for communications.

Furthermore, despite its shortcomings (and the considerable criticism it receives), the written press still has significant credibility. For much of the population (including students), the written word, an article printed in the press, still has weight.

Finally, the need for perspective and analysis has never been as important as it is in now in the face of news which is both complex and abundant. It is likely that a new pay-for-content model for the press will emerge online, as is currently the case for music. The current system, in which most articles are available for free on the Web, cannot last forever.

Working with the Press

In this context, press relations remain essential to institutions of higher education. The press continues to play a key role in revealing and explaining the profound changes taking place in education. And journalists have never before been so sought after by business schools and universities...

But how does an institution work with the press? What should it expect? What kinds of relationships can it establish with journalists and the media in general?

First and foremost, schools must have a good understanding of the media universe. They need to identify the various types of newspapers and other media. Most of all, they have to understand how journalists operate, the demands of their profession, their work methods. Some, for example, are more interested in major trends and wider topics, while others want factual details, or human interest stories and personal accounts...

Institutions have to try to respond quickly and efficiently to requests from the press. Not because they have to give in to the "whims" of journalists, but because the deadlines in their news rooms are getting tighter.

Finally, it helps to be aware that the press does not want to cover all the news related to business schools and universities. And that information that seems very important by an institution's standards can seem secondary or marginal to a generalist newspaper. The relative importance of the news must be taken into consideration.

Tips for Improvement

Beyond these fundamentals, here are a few tips for improving relations with the press:

- Make an effort to **strengthen relationships** with journalists and even with newspaper management. For example, in addition to the traditional press conferences and interviews, arrange opportunities for less formal, more intimate exchanges: campus tours, dinners or parties, colloquia, press trips... In the United States, many universities offer journalists training seminars specifically for their profession: a good way to establish friendly, relaxed relations;
- Give the press access to **as much information as possible** – particularly through the institution's website. This should include the most recent press releases, latest news, expert

viewpoints, blogs... And don't forget a photo gallery, or even a video gallery. These elements can enrich an article. It is not uncommon for a newspaper to decide to publish an article because there is a good picture to go with it...

- Make it easier for the media to **access the expertise of the faculty**. By displaying on the website a list of professors, their areas of expertise, their e-mail addresses, or even phone numbers, for example. One can also send interviews to newspapers (in text or video format), or provide faculty members' opinions on various subjects.

- Avoid as much as possible **ambiguity due to paid advertising**. True, most newspapers need advertising to survive. It accounts for a large part of their financing; sometimes more than half, and even more for "freebies." Nonetheless, buying advertising space should not create a conflict with the content of the articles. It should not be a bargaining tool. Universities and schools must avoid using it as a lever in order to "score" interviews or reports. And, inversely, newspapers should not use the potential publication of articles and interviews to get institutions to buy advertising...

Furthermore, avoid the opportunistic attitude of those who consider newspapers to be "free advertising" and who adapt their press communications to that end. Approaches like these alter the relationship between the press and institutions.

Creating a New Relationship

But that's not all. For the longer term, it would be a good idea for higher educational institutions and the press – or at least the "quality" press – to come up with a new model for collaboration. The two worlds, despite appearances, are complementary. The media need higher education – both to help with in-depth analysis and to bring in advertising revenue. And it would benefit universities and schools to better explain the challenges they face, to make their research work more accessible and, by doing so, come down from the ivory tower. The press can help them achieve that. So it is in the best interest of higher education and the media to nurture their relationship. It makes even more sense because, deep down, they are very similar; aren't information and education, when it comes down to it, two sides of the same coin – that of the transmission of knowledge? The path towards a more fruitful collaboration still needs to be identified. And the area of "press relations" could be where this collaboration occurs.

Journalists

Arrogant, superficial, constantly overwhelmed, disorganized, impossible to pin down, (very) demanding... There are plenty of adjectives – not always flattering – used to describe journalists.

There is no doubt some truth to these stereotypes. But the fact is, like all professions, journalism is very diverse – in terms of training, work methods, and backgrounds. While some might come across as arrogant know-it-alls, there are others who are humble and receptive. Their habits and expectations regarding communications departments and press attachés vary considerably. One of the keys to how they function lies in the fact that, most of the time, journalists are in a hurry, deluged with information and all manners of solicitations – even more so now that news related to higher education is being added to the mix more frequently. They are also under increasingly high pressure to "produce" and, therefore, not very available... It's best to be aware of this.

B. Advertising

When it comes to advertising, an institution wants to send a "message" to a "target audience" of a given size. Addressing a large audience is appropriate for creating awareness about an institution and establishing its brand. For such situations, one can use the generalist media for the general public. On the other hand, to attract candidates (or, even more so, professors), one should look to more specialized media: student newspapers, press read by managers and executives, education-related sections and supplements, educational TV channels, etc. In reality, all media have unique characteristics and specific audiences, and one needs to know what these are. This is why it is important not to rush in unprepared, but to come up with a "media plan."

In any case, it is better to avoid overextending oneself by using too many channels. At the same time, one should avoid putting out a news story only occasionally, because the results can be quite limited. It is advisable, in general, to keep a lower profile, but a consistent presence over a given period (from one week to several months or more). Not to mention that with the crisis, most media are agreeing to give significant discounts to regular advertisers... In all circumstances, the content of the ads must be well thought out and carefully conceived – this includes the visual aspect, graphics, etc. One advantage that advertising offers the institution is by placing an ad, it retains complete control over the message, its appearance, how it is created – which is not the case for articles written by journalists.

There is another advertising option that is quite well suited to higher education, but that has lost some momentum because it is often badly executed: the infomercial.

The Press Throughout The World

In each country, the media functions in their own way and the journalists have their particular working methods and habits. Only practice and experience can provide real insight into the workings of the profession, the way information is approached and treated, its centres of interest. Even the authenticity of information does not necessarily have the same weight everywhere.

There are, however, a few major characteristics that are common to every country. Some of these are:

- In the United States, information must circulate very quickly. So there must be a mechanism for getting information to the intended target fast.
- In the UK, the specialized educational press uses largely freelance journalists;
- In Germany, it's preferable to be concise, get to the point and use concrete facts;
- In China, the press is gradually distancing itself from governmental influence. In addition, it is customary to cover the travel expenses of journalists who attend press conferences;
- In Scandinavian countries, priority is generally given to news items related directly to the country and current events. It should also be noted that most journalists refuse to accept invitations to press trips;
- In Italy, journalists place great stock in the quality of personal relationships;
- In France, the relationship aspect is also very important. So press attachés there play a particularly important role.

No matter what, on all continents, a high degree of professionalism is expected.

A Variety of Media

Advertising higher education can take many forms:

- the written press;
- audiovisual media (radio and TV). Their recent offshoots (Internet TV, podcasts, BlogTV, etc.) offer new platforms for reaching a student audience that is wild about technology, video games, comics;
- posters. Use of posters by universities and business schools (for MBA programmes, manager and executive training, etc.) is more common in places frequented by managers and business people, such as airports and business centres, or even the subway...
- booklets, brochures, pamphlets, flyers and various documents presenting the institution;
- film. Although it happens to be rarely used by higher education, it seems appropriate for the student audience.

The Web is another media form that has been increasingly competing with advertising. It has its own visual codes and its own operating rules so, although it is generally less expensive than traditional advertising, it can entail creative and management costs that can add up. And though it allows one to reach an enormous audience very quickly, including distant countries, the resulting contacts are often not adequately filtered (in other words, they may be far from the target), and managing them can be complicated. In short, online ads are effective tools if they are handled correctly.

Other options are just beginning to become available. These include advertisements on mobile phones, which could be an interesting option for higher education. With a variety of media to choose from and great freedom of expression, advertising offers institutions considerable room to move in terms of scope and creativity – as long as they stick to their strategy. Although, strangely enough, the advertising campaigns of many institutions tend to be rather conservative and not very original.

Event Organization

Events are another form of advertising often used by business schools and universities. In other words, organizing events in order to capture media attention and generate buzz. This option offers several possibilities:

- **colloquia**, conferences and other forums for debate. Schools and universities can organize these or simply participate in them and display their logos. But not everyone has the means to organize an annual Davos Conference...

Along the same lines, universities and schools sometimes give out awards or trophies in various disciplines (best manager award, most ethical project award, etc.). Or they publish studies or surveys;

- **student sports competitions**. The advantage of this type of event is that it appeals to the youthful, dynamic and "healthy" student world. In the United States, students and other universities participate in numerous competitions on university campuses.
- **contests** and other management competitions (for creating a product or service). These essentially follow the same logic as athletic competitions. They are related to the students' course work, allowing them to show their competitive spirit and adding a playful element that is very well received. Major events of this type include:

The Boat Race

The most iconic of student athletic competitions is, without question, the traditional rowing competition on the Thames that has pitted Oxford and Cambridge university students against each other every year since 1829. It is an event attended by hundreds of thousands of spectators and watched by several million television viewers across the globe. Plus, it generates considerable press coverage (articles, photos, news reports) all over the world.

- The Euromanagers tournament, sponsored by companies and involving nearly 20,000 students in around 30 countries;
- The "Imagine Cup," a sort of world championship of the digital universe organized by Microsoft, in which 300,000 students around the world compete;
- SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise), a worldwide challenge to come up with humanitarian projects that takes place in around 40 countries.
- **festive events** (anniversaries, galas, graduation ceremonies, etc.) for students and the institutional community. These provide opportunities to strengthen ties within the institution (internal communications) and to create buzz. Throughout the world, more and more formal graduation ceremonies are taking place, with students wearing graduation gowns.

C. Other Communications Options

In addition to traditional advertising, there are other options that are used in the higher education sphere. One of these is sales of **logo merchandise**, which is very common among certain respected North American institutions. This practice is picking up steam in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Even the very traditional Sorbonne in Paris has begun offering a range of items bearing its logo (t-shirts, pens, watches, etc.).

Public relations activities, however, are less widespread – despite the fact that they can be very effective. This is simply a matter of inviting people who have a relationship with the college or university (company directors, prospects, personalities from the business world or the arts milieu, journalists, sponsors, etc.) to attend high-profile events, such as athletic competitions, concerts, shows... An opportunity for the institution to strengthen its image, create ties and to explore new avenues for collaboration.

Higher educational institutions can also communicate by participating in **recruitment fairs** or **careers fairs** for students. There is also **publishing** (or co-publishing) of scholarly works and research. For example, Harvard has its own publishing house (Harvard University Press).

Every Little Bit Counts

For a business school or university, as for any other organization, communication can also occur in unexpected ways; in their day-to-day operations, in the quality of their departments, in the attractiveness of their facilities, in the behaviour of everyone associated with them... All of these details, seemingly ordinary and unrelated to an institution's primary mission, nonetheless contribute to building its image.

In this area, there are endless concrete examples. An attractive brochure, happy and natural students, a well-organized colloquium, a successful presentation, a comfortable, well-equipped meeting room will all have a positive influence on the overall perception of the institution.

By contrast, an elevator that is out of order, a badly adjusted sound system, unpleasant telephone operators, a professor who babbles on, paint peeling off of lecture hall walls; these are the kinds of things that damage the image of an institution.

Some, like IMD in Lausanne, or HEC in Montreal, pay a great deal of attention to "the little details that say a lot."

D. Crisis Communications

People tend to believe that universities and business schools are immune to serious problems or major disasters. These "temples of knowledge" are generally perceived as oases of peace and serenity. Things like unforeseen events or accidents have no place there. At least that's what many deans or directors think.

But experience tells us that higher educational institutions, like any other entity (companies, countries, organizations), can experience crisis and difficulty of all kinds. Computer outages or hacking, accidents, fire, theft, abductions (abroad), outbreaks of disease... Anything can happen. Among the most common delicate or critical situations that can be encountered are the various problems students have when studying abroad, losing an accreditation or quality certification, a severe drop in the rankings, a serious accident befalling a student, sudden problems with graduate placement, financial uncertainty... Not to mention the inevitable damaging rumours that are, by definition, unexpected. Some examples: In 2008, UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal) was the subject of numerous articles in the press because of difficulties it was having financing an ambitious real estate project. Harvard was brought to task because of the "sexist" language of their former dean. And, in December of 2008, Reims Management School had to deal with the tragic death of a student participating in an exchange programme in Budapest, Hungary. The school reacted very quickly by executing a real crisis communications plan that included a call for witnesses via the French media and Hungarian correspondents in France, creation of a support group (in multiple languages) on Facebook, and providing support for students on the campus.

The Right Answer

Every year, many institutions encounter situations like these, which could seriously damage their image. This is even truer now that the Web and social networks make it possible for negative information and rumours to flourish and travel very quickly. Universities and schools often have trouble coming up with an appropriate response in terms of communications. In every situation, the important thing is to react quickly and to have a crisis communications plan in place. Key elements: coming up with a clear message, adopting measures to resolve a problem or limit its impact, making one or more representatives available to the press and, above all, transparency: it is better to admit a mistake, even a very serious one, than to become entangled in convoluted and unconvincing excuses. It should be taken into account, however, that such a system is not easy to put together. So it is advisable to seek the assistance of a specialist in crisis communications management.

Chapter 6

WEB 2.0 AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

"Information technology is today a strategic lever for the creation of values for any business or organization. In the communications sector and in particular within universities and business schools, if we do not capitalize on the possibilities of these technologies, it would be like committing commercial suicide. Indeed, we are entering an era where we no longer only go in search of information, but where relevant and real-time information makes its way to us. This is the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, or put in real terms, the difference between Google as an Internet search engine and Twitter as a social networking site. "

Dr. Tawfik JELASSI

Dean and President

ENPC International School of Management

The Internet has changed the game

The following applies to higher education as much as it does to most other sectors: the advent of the Internet changed everything. The Web opened up new frontiers for universities and business schools, giving them much more extensive options than they had before. But, at the same time, it has had a profound effect on the way they communicate.

First of all, it allowed universities and business schools to reach a much wider audience – in distant countries, for example – and at a relatively low cost. It made it possible to communicate with that audience practically instantaneously. As a result, information travelled much faster, it was less controlled, and Internet users the world over had much easier access to it. A Brazilian student wants to know more about Norwegian universities? All it takes is a few clicks to choose one – and she doesn't even need to know the names of these universities, much less speak Norwegian... This is how the Internet radically accelerated the globalization of higher education. It also increased competition among institutions.

Little by little, the Internet also made it possible to deliver richer content, thanks, in particular, to high-speed connections. After text and simple graphics came images, audio and video files that can be easily shared and which interact with each other in a very sophisticated way.

A New Way to Communicate

There is a new way of communicating online today, with the rise of Web 2.0, and one that truly changes the nature of communications. Today, information flows in both directions – from the "speaker" towards the receiver and vice versa. The "receiver" of the message is also a participant in the conversation. He speaks out, gives his opinions, votes, criticises – he, too, can express himself. And he can be "heard" by thousands of other Internet users who will react in turn... So institutional and "mass" communications, in all sectors, must be adapted to be more flexible, more personalized, less organized. The Internet has become a real media form in and of itself.

And the current upheaval has significant implications for higher education for two reasons.

First, because students today are particularly drawn to new technologies. Since childhood, most of them have juggled video games, mobile phones, MP3 players, computers... Information technologies and the associated tools are their universe, their preferred platforms for expression, their culture. So much so that they can be described as "the Web Generation." Second, higher educational institutions and major research centres are very closely linked with the Internet. It was created in research labs and on university campuses, to enable exchanges among researchers, where it flourished. Plus, universities are generally equipped with pretty powerful networks and servers. In short, the Web and digital technologies are the preferred instruments of higher education.

But it is important to master this instrument. By way of example, a Google keyword search for "business school" returns more than 75 million results... High placement in search engine results is a major issue for communications directors.

And that is not the whole story. The Web is more than just a new media platform. It is encroaching on the territory of all other media forms, which it simultaneously complements and cannibalizes. It is linked to newspapers, radio, television. It is an extension – a newspaper's website is part of the newspaper, after all – and, at the same time, a competitor.

This transformation is occurring before our very eyes. With it come new rules, new practices, of which no one can yet predict the long-term consequences. And there are those who are already talking about the rise of Web 3.0, of even more powerful search engines. One thing is certain: universities and colleges cannot ignore the Internet revolution.

The Website: A Window to the Institution

In higher education, an institution's website is the most visible way in which it uses the Internet. It is the first point of contact with the outside world. It is where prospective students, current students, businesses and professors go to obtain information, interact and meet.

What can one find on the website of a university or business school?

An abundance of concrete information:

- a general presentation of the institution, including its history, its values, its strategy;
- a list of programmes and their content in varying levels of detail;
- an overview of primary activities – research, continuing education, graduate placement, etc;
- images (photos or videos) of the campus and key personnel;
- useful links, contacts;
- usually a word from the director, dean, or president.

In some cases, institutions also offer a list of FAQs, a virtual tour of the campus, interviews with personalities (recruiters, etc.), student and alumni testimonies, a section specifically for journalists (with, if possible, a selection of royalty-free images), etc. Some institutions even allow free access to their courses online. This is true of MIT and ParisTech, a consortium of 11 engineering colleges. Some of them also guide visitors according to their profiles, with specific content for prospective students, current students, journalists and even potential donors.

The Makings of a Good Website

What makes a website good? How can universities and business schools use this "window" to stand out from the crowd? There is no easy answer, since styles vary so much from one institution to another. But there are a few essential ingredients:

- aesthetic and graphical quality;
- ergonomics: easy to locate oneself, to navigate, to find the right information;
- quality content: rich, relevant, complete;
- regular updates.

Some of the more popular extras:

- a version in English, and even other languages;
- a section specifically for the press – ideally including recent press releases, contact info for a representative who can be easily reached, photos (high resolution), video documents, a list of experts who can weigh in on certain subjects on short notice;
- an FAQ section;
- a "facts and figures" section (number of students, budget, faculty, size of the campus, etc.);
- testimonials from students, alumni, faculty;
- videos that enrich the site;
- wiki or instant messaging capabilities that allow potential candidates to interact with staff or students;
- search capability on the home page.

The possibilities are endless.

But the website is more than just an information booth. It is also the reflection of the institution, its window to the world. The site architecture, the quality of its interactive features, the ergonomics of it, all of these things express the institution's ambitions and its reach. Therefore, it plays a critical role in recruiting new students as well as in maintaining contact with alumni, in strengthening relationships with businesses, and in attracting new faculty.

All of this is to stress the importance of designing a site with care, as well as updating it on a daily basis. Over time, the Internet has imposed its own codes for writing, graphical elements, interactivity, ergonomics, variety of media (text, animation, video, audio, etc.). Furthermore, the content must be adapted for its various audiences. It is becoming more common to offer multiple language versions of sites (English at the very least, plus the languages of the countries that are most important to the institution).

A good site must be regularly updated – there is nothing worse than displaying outdated information.

Good website management requires people with a variety of expertise: a webmaster, designers/graphic artists, SEO specialists, writers, developers... Some of these tasks are usually outsourced. The development of a website can be quite costly.

In a study conducted in March, 2008, the EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) analyzed the characteristics of a good website for a business school. Their first obser-

vation: Ninety percent of potential students use the Web to learn more about their future school. Among these, around 25% do not have a firm idea of where they will go to school when they visit a website. And 60% begin their research by reviewing the programmes offered. Finally, for 66% of them, the downloadable course catalogue is one of the most important tools. The information that users seek the most falls into three areas: the programmes, the tuition and the careers services.

The study also showed that deans tend not to appear on home pages, to allow for the display of more compelling content.

EFMD also pointed out that figuring prominently in guides, supplements and special educational issues published by the press can generate traffic to a website.

Web 2.0: A Collaborative Tool

With the rise of Web 2.0, communications in higher education took on a new dimension. This participative version of the Web, also called interactive, or collaborative Web, is built on sharing and exchange among Internet users. The information shared online (text, audio, video) is the fruit of their collaboration, thanks to technologies like RSS feeds, which make it easier for more people to contribute and enable aggregation of the flow of information. Internet users (students, among others) can interact with both online content and the reactions of other visitors to a site. With Web 2.0, the Internet user is also an active participant.

More than just a new tool, Web 2.0 seems to be a new approach, a philosophy, a different way of sharing.

Of course, there are innumerable ways in which Web 2.0 can be used in teaching – for student group projects, or research, for example. There is a new way of teaching and it appears in the form of e-learning.

But the results of this trend are at least as important to communications in universities and business schools. Web 2.0 is behind the rise of social networking sites, wikis, Internet TV, in which students, recruiters, professors and researchers play a major role. So institutions must pay attention to what is going on in world of Web 2.0. They must, as a matter of fact, fully invest in it.

Social Networks Mobilize Students

These are, in the eyes of many observers, the main contribution of Web 2.0. Very popular with students, social networks allow them to build "communities" around various themes.

Among the most well known of these networks are:

- Facebook, with tens of millions of members all over the world. It offers a way to recreate a personal and professional universe on the Internet. In all, there are more than 70,000 alumni associations on Facebook – with announcements about student events and parties, tools for finding former classmates, surveys, etc.;
- professional networks like LinkedIn, StudiVZ or Viadeo. They allow students to manage their image, to expand their network of contacts and to increase their marketability;

- sites for sharing like Twitter, YouTube, and DailyMotion. YouTube, for example, "hosts" a growing number of university TV channels. These are used to show promotional videos (interviews with alumni, student organizations, etc.) and content (courses, lectures, debates). A physics course at Berkeley was viewed 130,000 times;
- MySpace, for exchanging music, photos and videos;
- Flickr, for exchanging photos.

There are also innumerable networks built around an activity, hobby, or centre of interest: research, language learning (Mango Languages, Italki...), recruitment, etc. Students are very active on some of these.

One should note, however, that on these social networks, the personal data of members is stored for long periods (sometimes several years) and can sometimes be used against them – for example, when they are job hunting. Some networks also use this data to display targeted advertising adapted to a member's profile. Facebook even sells this data.

Stanford: One Course Downloaded a Million Times in Seven Weeks

Stanford University in the United States recently began offering an online training course dedicated to developing applications for Apple's iPhone and iPod. Offered in the form of free videos on iTunes U, the course has had enormous success: it was downloaded a million times in seven weeks. A record for a course on iTunes U according to Apple.

Other Web 2.0 Options

Web 2.0 has many applications and features to offer. Among these are:

- **blogs** which allow for the expression of opinions (through a "post") and to comment on the posts of others. A blog is essentially a conversation between an author and other contributors. In a sense, blogs are somewhere between being tools for information (or reflection) and tools for persuasion. There are photo blogs, video blogs and even mob blogs (updated via mobile telephones). At universities, it is not uncommon for groups of bloggers to publish posts on shared experiences on which they can all comment.
- **RSS feeds** (Really Simple Syndication). These are XML formats meant for "syndication" of content. Widely used by informational blogs, they allow users to "subscribe" to different topics or areas of interest. RSS feeds are often associated with sharing of bookmarks, by which people discover new sites suggested by others.
- **multimedia file sharing**. This takes place via specialized sites like YouTube (for video) or Flickr (for photos), on which Internet users can store any files they like. Students are very active on these sites.
- **podcasts**. In other words, downloading of multimedia content. Some universities and colleges use podcasts to disseminate videos of their courses as multimedia files. There are many platforms specializing in educational podcasts (Apple's iTunes U, SciVee...). There are also platforms specifically for exchanging videos of courses or lectures given by professionals.

- **wikis.** These are content management systems that allow registered users to modify the content of the pages. Wikis are used to manage collaborative projects that require the storage of collective knowledge. The free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, which was launched in 2001, is based on a wiki.

Web 2.0 also features 3D universes, like Second Life, where it is possible to create an avatar. These playful virtual worlds, with graphic elements that resemble cartoons and comic strips, can be useful for recruitment, teaching and communications.

Many of these innovations and applications are used for personal and leisure purposes, but they can also have professional uses. There are also numerous applications for the educational environment (teaching, research, administration) – some even aspire to revolutionize education. In short, Web 2.0 offers Internet users, especially students, a multitude of new options.

But its impact in terms of communications for higher education is far from negligible. Indeed, Web 2.0 gives all members of the university community the chance to express themselves, to share their comments or videos, to praise or criticize a given project. It is nothing like the traditional top-down model for corporate communications: now communication is a participative, community activity.

By searching YouTube for a university or business school, a user will no doubt be able to view dozens, if not hundreds of related videos. The Stanford Channel on YouTube features more than 150 videos, mostly created by students. A video produced by the Columbia Business School has been viewed by more than a million Internet users. More often than not, these videos are uploaded by the students themselves – without any prior "authorization." And these videos can have a major impact – positive or negative – on an institution's image.

The Lip Dub Hits Campuses

A lip dub, the brainchild of New York communications agency, Connected Venture, in 2007, is a short video filmed in a single sequence shot with a hit song for a soundtrack that is then published online. The point: to show people at work in an unconventional and friendly light. Today, the lip dub is taking campuses by storm across Europe. It is a much more playful way for a university or college to present its campus, students, professors, and programmes than a more formal film would be. And it allows the institution to come across as relaxed, attractive – more "fun."

Some lip dubs have become real hits and been viewed hundreds of thousands of times by students and alumni. There is even an international lip dub competition that was created by a group of German students.

It is usually students themselves who make these videos – sometimes with a cameo of the dean or president of the institution. The administration, for its part, is happy to go along with the trend and to finance the projects because they are not costly. But they run the risk of appearing amateurish. The lip dub phenomenon, in any case, confirms that higher education has entered the era of "shared" communications.

Young People and New Media

There have been many studies on the behaviour of young people, students in particular, with regard to new media (mobile telephones, computers, smartphones, etc.) and the Web. Three distinct trends are apparent.

Existing in a universe saturated with the Internet and audiovisual media (film, music, video games, television...) and conditioned to use all of these digital tools, students are increasingly captivated by images, special effects, graphics, the "spectacle" – sometimes presented in a playful way – of information and communication. They are very fond of podcasts (or vodcasts), which they watch, download and exchange. They have become very savvy and demanding users.

Second, many are drawn to the "free culture," which is very common on the Web with so many different sites offering free downloads, software and media-related material. They do not seem inclined to pay for information.

Finally, many young people and students seem to want to take a more active role with regard to information. They want to be authors or co-authors themselves – through blogs, forums, sites like DailyMotion, etc. In short, they want to cut out the middle man. And the options offered by Web 2.0 satisfy this wish. They are very active on blogs, forums and social networking sites. Some sociologists say that through social media, students engage in the rituals and behaviours of gangs, tribes, clubs...

However, sometimes students exhibit contradictory attitudes. They seem to be quite attracted to snippets of brief information that are instantaneous and very fact based. Many others, however, also seem to need more perspective, more insight and a closer analysis of current events, which are overwhelming in number and complex.

Finding the language and platforms that are right for this audience is, therefore, a major issue for universities and business schools.

The Most Popular Applications

According to a survey conducted in Great Britain by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) in 2007, the most commonly used Internet applications at universities were (in descending order):

- Wikipedia
- MSN Messenger
- discussion forums
- personal blogs
- institutional or corporate blogs
- online calendars (Google, Yahoo!, Outlook)
- Skype
- YouTube
- MySpace
- FaceBook
- Chess

The informational sites of newspapers and the mainstream media were also widely visited. Note that this order changes constantly...

Control Without Censorship

The main question for universities and colleges is how to integrate these new modes of expression into their communications processes without resorting to censorship, but while still keeping things under control. Another challenge: the word-of-mouth phenomenon (or "e-reputation"), already a major factor in higher education, can grow and travel with unheard of speed with Web 2.0. What is the best way to handle this? The challenge is considerable for educational institutions which, though sometimes on the cutting edge of technology, are often reluctant to adopt new practices.

In this area, Anglo-Saxon universities, especially in the United Kingdom, appear to be at the forefront. At the University of Warwick in England, every student has his own blog. In April of 2007, there were already almost 5,000 student blogs. The University of Leeds organizes online debates with its students. As for the University of Edinburgh, it has integrated the range of Web 2.0 tools into its operations. Newsletters, for example, have been replaced with blogs that have RSS feeds; the administration uses Google maps and mapping applications to guide students...

How to Moderate Blogs

On the blogs of business schools and universities, moderation is almost always done after the fact. The staff does not interfere with the discussions and only removes insults or defamatory statements. Usually, comments left by Internet users remain within acceptable limits. But what if things get out of hand? This is a question that most communications managers ask themselves.

The Image Boom

The craze surrounding audiovisual expression in all its forms is growing on campuses all over the world. Everywhere, video extracts (interviews with experts, animations, virtual tours) are increasing and taking the place of text. Video is everywhere, from short films of all kinds to recorded university lectures.

Even Movie Directors...

Communications professionals are not the only ones to speak for universities and business schools. There is a new trend emerging. Film producers and directors are also getting involved in the creation of films and other audiovisual products for these institutions, in the same way that renowned brands call on well-known artists for their advertising campaigns. In the United States, famous directors are now working regularly in the higher education sector and audiovisual production companies are commonly collaborating with universities. Their productions are then broadcast online via social networking sites or Internet TV channels, at theatres, or during various events (galas, parties, etc.).

In Europe, the movement is also growing. But many institutions, for financial reasons, still prefer to entrust students with part of their audiovisual communications. Which poses a risk to their image and reputation...

More and more universities and business schools are making promotional films. Of course, this tool is nothing new: Australian universities, for example, have been using video for about 15 years. But today it is becoming more common.

The exponential growth of the Internet and its increased community capabilities encourage the dissemination of this material. Not to mention that new channels are emerging:

- Internet TV channels, many of which have been launched by universities or colleges. Many Anglo-Saxon universities (like MIT, Stanford, Purdue, or even the University of Sydney in Australia) have their own channels, which display their school colours and broadcast on YouTube. On the programme schedule are recorded courses, discussions and case studies, faculty interviews, lectures, miscellaneous educational content, virtual campus tours, all kinds of videos... These Internet TV channels are also a way to reach prospective students, businesses and professors. There are now TV channels targeting the entire student population as well;
- PMT (personal mobile television), which is due to take off at any moment. There could be many applications for PMT in higher education, including advertising messages targeting students, management games, training modules, etc.

New Tools, New Practices

Tomorrow, the convergence of the Internet and mobile telephones, the advent of new practices with Web 3.0 will do even more to expand the options for communications using the Web and digital technologies. This future is taking shape today, in research laboratories, but even more so in the day-to-day behaviour of students, researchers, professors. A few elements are beginning to materialize: the rise of 3D, the increase in "semiotic" approaches, new forms of collaborative work, new marketing tools. But we are far from being able to identify every piece of the puzzle.

However, one thing is certain: the range of tools, the channels and means for expression to which higher educational institutions have access are still increasing. Never have institutions had richer and more creative options for communicating. But never has the task been so complex, or of such strategic importance for communications departments.

This is why universities and schools – particularly their communications departments – need to monitor these changes closely and integrate them into their processes. If they don't, tomorrow they could find themselves left behind.

Chapitre 7

TOMORROW'S COMMUNICATIONS

"Business schools, because we teach management, have very particular and heightened responsibilities to develop clear and effective communications strategies, but communications must be an outgrowth of the overall strategic choices and not the other way around. Given a solid strategic process based on appropriate goals, communications becomes crucial for a business school. Students are inspired to be great leaders when they are aware of being part of a great educational effort, an effort founded on maximizing their educational accomplishments, an effort that is based on worthy principles. It is also true that those who support a school must be informed of the good a school is doing for its students, and it is a grave error to assume that the appropriate understanding just flows naturally from doing good works. Clear plans and talented communications personnel are essential if a global effort is to be mounted. Of course, most schools have a regional focus and the resources that can be devoted to a communications effort vary greatly across schools. In any event, the academic leader must take messaging seriously and fashion a communications strategy that is compatible with the academic setting."

Paul DANOS

Dean, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth

What will communications in higher education be like tomorrow? How important will it be? How will universities and business schools manage their communications? Planning ahead is always tricky, so it's best to approach this with care. Still, observing the current trends – those analyzed here – will help give a general and fairly reliable idea. Here is a brief look at the "next practices," many of which are already in effect in some places.

A. The Major Trends

1. Increasing Importance. In some countries communications in higher education is still in its infancy, but will continue to progress, if for no other reason than because of the constant competition and benchmarking practiced by all institutions. The institutions that have fallen behind in terms of communications will have to catch up or risk being marginalized.

2. Even More Professionalism. Communications will become more and more targeted, sophisticated, evolved. In a word: more professional. One can anticipate a number of changes:

- Communications teams will get larger – and more specialized. A single person cannot simultaneously come up with a media plan, draft press releases, manage graphic designers, produce videos, write a blog, monitor activity on the social networking sites...
- Their work methods will evolve. There will be closer ties with the institution's administration, identification of clear objectives, serious reflection on the institution's positioning and competitive advantages, brand development activities, adaptation of messages to different targets (high school and university students, alumni, professors, businesses...), evaluation of different communications activities;
- Appearance, at all levels, will receive more attention. Graphic style, logo, videos, photos, website, various booklets and documents will be created with much greater care;
- Communications teams will be better trained. Logically, they should also see an increase in salary...;
- Outsourcing of certain activities (graphic design, audiovisual production, audits, consulting, etc.) will increase;
- All of these changes should be accompanied by higher budgets that are consistent with the changes.

3. Richer Communications. Communications departments will have available to them a growing selection of tools and media: television, mobile telephones, blogs, videos, podcasts, social networks... At the same time, their messages will reach an even more diverse audience (prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, professors, businesses, etc.) and one that is more fragmented. Three things to expect:

- One of the issues will be coming up with messages and tools appropriate for each audience;
- Originality and differentiation will without a doubt be even more essential than it is today. Naturally, this approach will have to be in keeping with the institution's strategic positioning and brand;
- New types of communications activities will emerge. For example, management games for mobile telephones, advertising via text messages, podcast content, short messages on Twitter....

4. The International is Ever Present. The international dimension will become more important – even for institutions without global aspirations.

- Bilingualism (English + the language of the home country), already quite common, will practically be a requirement for many documents and messages put out by institutions – especially on their websites. Even trilingualism (adding the language of a target country) will increase;
- The "communicators" at every institution will have to travel more and participate, among other things, in recruitment or higher education fairs across the globe;
- Although it will become more fragmented, communications in higher education will have to adopt a certain number of standards worldwide and become more uniform.

5. More Internet, Less Intervention. A new era in communications for higher education has begun. Faster, more responsive and more interactive, it increasingly makes it possible for different groups (students, alumni, professors) to express themselves and their opinions, in a more or less spontaneous way, often acting on their own. All of this occurs without the intervention of communications professionals (journalists, communications directors, marketers...).

The social networks and diverse "communities" on the Web in particular will experience considerable growth. It is reasonable to imagine that tomorrow, students all over the world will be linked through multiple networks.

As a result, phenomena like buzz marketing and e-reputation, which are still somewhat limited, will gain influence among the student population.

Institutions, for their part, will have to pay close attention to their reputations and images on the Web. And be ready to react quickly. But they will not really be able to manage or control these phenomena...

6. The New Era of Communications. So higher education must prepare itself to accept that communications will no longer come from a single source and be disseminated from the top down, but that information will be produced by the recipients themselves (especially students) – and, if possible, with them. It will be co-created.

Institutions and students will have to learn to share the communications space and its tools, and to speak the same language. The same is true for businesses.

Communications will be scaled down, more dispersed, more "democratic." More participative, less hierarchical. It will also become less serious, more playful, more fun, more attractive. In short, most of the paradigms of today's model are likely to change.

B. Future Changes

And there's more. In the future, other changes, new projects, will emerge in communications for higher education. Here are a few:

- **Increased Importance of Video.** Video will expand, particularly via networks like DailyMotion and YouTube. It is at the heart of the growth of the Internet. Already, many institutions in Europe are establishing a true internal television network. In the United States, movie directors are working more and more with higher education.
- **Increased Use of Mobile Tools.** Mobile telephones, smartphones, iPods, personal computers, netbooks... Content will have to be adapted to all of these tools. Short messages, specific formats and graphics...
- **The Importance of Alumni Networks.** Many institutions are beginning to realize that their alumni can be powerful vectors for communication. They have access to large networks, they are very attached to the image of their alma maters, and they are living all over the world...
- **Positive Communication.** Communications departments will need to be more involved not only with problem solving, but also with generating collective enthusiasm for their institutions and getting people to embrace the values of these institutions.
- **Quality of Equipment and Facilities.** This will increasingly be a condition imposed by students and managers who are in continuing education programmes. This is why it is necessary to invest in real estate, renovate classrooms and lecture halls, provide work and meeting spaces that are comfortable and well equipped.
- **Professor/Ambassadors.** Faculty members will be called on more frequently to express themselves publicly. They are the best candidates to demonstrate the quality of the institution. Already, some universities and colleges readily offer media training to their faculty in order to help them become better communicators.
- **The Rise of Global Communications** and personalized communications throughout the student life cycle: before they apply, during their student years and then beyond graduation and throughout their professional lives.
- **Capitalize on One's Roots.** A link to a community, which some institutions tend to neglect in favour of their global aspirations, could be reinforced. For many institutions, where they are located can actually be an important selling point. Many students in the world, for example, dream of studying in Paris, London or California. Not all institutions enjoy this added benefit.
- **A Higher Profile in Social Debate.** Universities and business schools could have a much higher profile when it comes to major societal issues. Some, like EDHEC in France, or Bocconi in Italy, have begun to do so. This is a way for them to strengthen their intellectual and moral authority.

Conclusion

The challenge of global communications

Of course, the quality of teaching and research, the creation of knowledge and academic excellence remain the primary concerns of universities and business schools. It is their "core mission."

But it is no longer enough. With international competition, institutions that want to "get ahead" must find funding, come up with a strategy and implement an appropriate communications plan. And these three essential elements are and will continue to be, increasingly intertwined. If they fail to address these issues, they risk falling off the map.

However, communicating effectively is impossible without adequate means – including financial means. Nor is it possible to succeed without establishing clear priorities and objectives, or without taking a professional approach.

So when it comes to communications, universities and business schools face a dual challenge. They must work towards operating on a larger scale and at the same time, come up with a new model.

In truth, higher education is entering the era of global competition.

Global, because its scope now extends to the entire planet. It has to speak to students (and businesses) all over the world. And competition among institutions is now the norm on all five continents.

Global, too, because it operates in multiple dimensions: brand strategy, corporate and informal communications, buzz marketing... To cover all this ground, it must use an increasingly wide range of channels and tools, and Internet has increased the number of possible options.

Finally, it is global because it must mobilize all the stakeholders in every institution. Communications departments and managers, of course, but also students, professors, alumni and business partners. They all have a voice and something to contribute. This is the challenge of communications in higher education.

Interviews

Kim KEATING

Director of Public Relations, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth

“We focus efforts
on the excellence of the faculty.”

With a limited budget, how does Tuck manage to come to the fore in terms of communication?

Tuck is extremely focused. The dean’s strategy for the school is to focus efforts on the excellence in research and teaching of the faculty and to focus efforts of all staff to make the best experience possible for our MBA students. Our PR and communication strategy mirrors the strategy of the school. We avoid placing ads but work very hard to meet the needs of the media. Our narrow focus allows us to work hard to concentrate on placing stories about our MBA programme and faculty.

Tuck is one of the American b-schools communicating the most at an international level. What tools or methods are most important when communicating?

We work to develop relationships around the world with key editors and journalists. Our long term partnership with the international firm Noir sur Blanc has been instrumental in allowing us to travel to many international cities and to meet editors face to face. Once a year, Tuck hosts an international conference for PR directors and international journalists. This conference allows the directors and editors to get to know each other and to understand better the needs of each metier.

Generally speaking, how important is online communication for you?

In essence, this is becoming the dominant way in which many audiences are communicating and receiving information.

You know Europe quite well. In your opinion, what are the most striking differences between the ways European and American universities communicate?

I think the answer is that it’s not about the nationality of the school, but rather the quality and global mindset of the school. I find that the communications directors at highly-rated schools with international vision and outreach are doing many of the same types of efforts and outreach, whether they are US or European. The top MBA programmes are thinking about international audiences and attracting the best faculty, students and recruiters from areas all over the world.

The schools that are more geared to local and regional efforts are reaching out to a smaller more regional audience for faculty, students and companies, again whether they are from the US or Europe.

Caleb HULME-MOIR

Head of Media at Cass Business School

“Our ambition is to be one of the top 10 business schools in the world.”

Cass Business School is particularly active in terms of communication. What are your main strategies in this area?

Five years ago we rebranded from City University Business School to Cass Business School. There was a major restructuring and 15 million pounds put into new buildings. We wanted to move from being well-ranked but relatively unknown, to being a well-known business school. Our ambition is to be one of the top 10 business schools in the world. Our strategy is to build the brand via communications and media relations, first in the UK and then in key international markets.

If you were asked to summarize Cass, what image and message would you like to put forward?

We're the only business school based in the financial district of London, the City. We provide training and graduates for firms working within the financial centre, a forum for debates and discussion, and do research and consultancy for large companies who need independent advice. That's our real core offering. We're very international in terms of our student base and that reflects the demographics of London. 70 percent of the students on our MBA programme come from overseas. We blend academic rigor with practical training and we are not an overly theoretical b-school. We are preparing people for real world jobs. There's a certain feel that comes with that; we're not sitting in our ivory towers.

Do you frequently use Web 2.0 and social networks? How do you use them?

It's strongly on the agenda. We've done a lot of thinking around Web 2.0 and we see the value of it. We think it's an incredibly important new channel for interacting with our potential customers. When we do a media pitch we also pitch key news sites online. We are starting to monitor what's being said about us online and we're considering a role within our team for someone who would do social networking.

How many people work in your communications department?

We have a marketing and communications team with a total of 12 people which includes an events team, a web team, a press team and a corporate marketing team. Four of these individuals handle media relations.

Do the professors at Cass play an important role in the school's communications? What do you expect from them? How do you engage them? How do you adjust their "comments" for the media?

They play a fundamental role. Without the academics on board you can't do anything. The difficulty when working with academics is that you must show them what you do. It's a slow, difficult and painful process. We've built up a good group of academics who want to do good PR. They get up early in the morning and stay up late at night and we sometimes ask them to do 4 to 5 interviews a day. We give them a channel to talk about what they do and we make sure that we celebrate the coverage they get by sharing it with the senior management team and their colleagues. The positive feedback they get encourages them to do more. We always brief them well, all while making them realize that they can't control what is written.

Richard PERRIN

Former Director of Communications at HEC-Paris

"Build a strong and recognized brand."

How does the HEC Group manage its communications?

Higher education has become a global market and a brand market. Students want to invest in strong values. We had to build a strong and recognized brand. In France, we began by "stretching" the brand of the grande école to promote our other programmes (MBA, Masters, executive education...). For example, we ran an ad featuring a mother and her daughter with the slogan "Any age is the right age for HEC." Internationally, between 2000 and 2004, we focused on the MBA, the standard recognized worldwide, to promote the HEC brand. This strategy allowed us to be more selective and move up in the rankings, which play a crucial role in the public perception of a brand. Then, in 2005-2007, we decided that all products should be promoted internationally under a single umbrella brand: HEC-Paris. Everywhere in the world, the city of Paris has a very rich and positive image. Finally, for several months, we have been working on a brand conversation that has a single tagline, rather than different "product messages." We want to make the HEC brand even more tangible with our slogan "The more you know, the more you dare." For each of our products, the message will consist of a specific slant based on the brand.

What are other forms of communication do you use to promote the HEC brand?

We have also implemented a content strategy. To stand out internationally, we need to emphasize the academic excellence of HEC. To do so, we signed an agreement with YouTube, which shows the videos of our professors; we launched the quarterly newsletter research@hec in French and English, which gathers articles by our professor-researchers that have appeared in the best scientific journals. In addition, we are going to publicize the progress of the first Chair financed by Apple on mobility in teaching and the careers of the future.

Does this mean that HEC will stop advertising?

Many wonder about the effectiveness of advertising, particularly in higher education. For international candidates, it serves to increase a brand's visibility. If you are unknown in China or the United States, the first thing you need to do is create brand awareness if you hope to recruit candidates. In other words, a brand that is being introduced should be accompanied by specific marketing activities. So a broad advertising campaign, backed up by online monitoring, and appropriate brand marketing. Given our rather tight budget, we opted for some guerrilla marketing methods: appearing in special issues of publications dedicated to Business Education, having a presence on websites where you have some control over impact and occasionally organizing events to solidify our status.

How do you envision the future of communications in higher education?

We are putting a great deal of effort into studying the impact of new technologies. The future of the Web, paradoxically, is video. Internet users consult and view content, but they take podcasts and videos with them... Mobility has become the word of the day. This is true in everyday life, and will be true in the promotion of schools. Plus, fundraising will undoubtedly have a considerable impact on the strategic approach for the brand. Defining a fundraising policy is planning for the future of the brand in tomorrow's reality. With new issues of presentation, identity and legitimacy. It's exciting work to be doing.

FAQs

Listed under broad categories, here are some of the questions most frequently asked of our consultants.

Rankings

- How can we improve our placement in international rankings?
- How can we get into the rankings?

Press Relations

- Which subjects are most likely to interest journalists?
- Is it better to rely on press relations or advertising?
- Why is our competitor cited in the press while we aren't?
- How do we generate more coverage with a limited budget?
- Is it necessary to advertise to be noticed by the media?
- What are international journalists interested in?
- What are the media's preferred subjects?
- When is the right time to release a news item?
- To which kind of media should we give priority?

International

- What are the major trends with regard to international strategy?
- What areas do the most prestigious institutions focus on?
- How do we improve our visibility on a national and international level?
- What is the best way to communicate internationally?

Miscellaneous

- Which universities or schools are the "rising stars" in terms of status?
- Is there "another way" to communicate when you are not a top university or school?
- How can we be more visible and better understood in non-academic circles – particularly by businesses and recruiters?
- Is it possible to manage your reputation on the Internet and how do you go about it?
- Are student fairs worth the expense?
- What portion of the budget should go towards communications?

Some Common Errors

For a higher education institution, there are many ways for communications to go wrong. From a minor slip-up on a detail (a press release without an address or phone number, for example), to a major error (inadequate strategy, incorrect positioning), which could do real damage to the image and development of an institution.

Here is a partial list – in no particular order – of minor and major errors, some of which can prove costly...

Strategy

- Lack of a strategic vision.
- Not having a real strategy; believing a tagline is all you need for communications.
- Thinking your institution is a brand and that it can stand on its own.
- Managing your strategy based on the criteria for rankings.

The Environment, the Competition

- Having only a national, or even local vision.
- Thinking your institution is the centre of the world, not assessing the other players – a kind of ego-centrism.
- Trying to copy your neighbour or direct competitor.
- Or, not positioning yourself in relation to the competition – national and international.
- Making constant allusions to the flaws or shortcomings of competing institutions.
- Doing very little market intelligence, benchmarking, or strategic intelligence.
- Lacking a certain critical distance relative to your activities – or those of others.
- Putting too much stock in rankings.
- Lacking understanding of the business world – when your future graduates are preparing to enter it.

International

- Establishing the institution abroad without communicating on it.
- Being arrogant towards those involved in higher education in foreign countries.
- Travelling abroad with the sole intention of selling what you do in your country without really caring how things are done in foreign institutions.
- Communicating in exactly the same way and with the same tools at home and abroad.

Organisation of a Communications Department

- Not ensuring that communications departments and international relations departments work together.
- Leaving the institution's communications to the professors alone.
- Expecting your communications agency to come up with ideas or topics for official statements without giving them the necessary background information.
- Attempting communications without means (financial and human)... or ideas.
- Placing no limits on the projects of professors, particularly with regard to strategy or communications.

The Art of Communicating

- Not being interested in communications.
- Lack of responsiveness, dynamism, initiative.
- Communicating much more about plans than about concrete results and accomplishments.
- Adopting an approach that is very descriptive, flat, lacking in originality.
- Confusing press relations with advertising or marketing.
- Communicating without adequate forethought on plans that lack substance and content.
- Settling for recycling old methods and/or communications models imposed by the leading institutions.
- Being a follower, not taking your strategy as far as it can go, avoiding taking a unique position.
- Refusing to take risks for fear of exposing yourself to criticism.
- Taking a one-shot approach, rather than a more regular and steady approach.
- Expecting immediate results from a press or advertising campaign. Both require a long-term commitment.
- Not knowing the rules of the game and constraints of press relations.
- Offering only the party line. In other words, giving a statement that lacks flavour, takes no risks, offers no surprises... and is not at all interesting.

Since it was founded in 1991, Noir sur Blanc has positioned itself around a single, innovative concept: communications in higher education. In 18 years, the agency has continued to innovate and evolve to best meet the needs of its clients. These efforts include anything from extending the range of its services, to becoming an international agency when it opened Noir sur Blanc Asia in Beijing in June of 2006.

An agency that offers consulting in institutional communications, with a strong international background, our Paris office is comprised of 26 multicultural staff members of 14 nationalities. In our sector, the agency has exceptional expertise and numerous references in the areas of advising, public relations, press relations, online and offline publishing, design and digital and audiovisual communications.

Today, Noir sur Blanc is in step with the changing market and evolving to embrace the knowledge economy. This is the issue of the day and we are here, right at the juncture of three worlds with common interests: higher education, research and innovation.



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