

BUILDING AND PROTECTING BRAND AND REPUTATION – The strategic role of corporate communications

Tony Langham introduces the Forum's new corporate communications special interest group



The role that corporate communications plays within a financial services organization has never been more crucial. In the too-much-information world, the power of the brand is paramount, and corporate communications professionals are at the forefront of building brands and protecting them from overnight destruction.

Our work rests on getting the messages right and co-ordinating communication with audiences that include government, regulators, intermediaries, media, consumer interest groups, customers, employees and, increasingly, the general public as well. This is a complex task, as a company's reputation generally rests on what others say about it, and not on what it says about itself.

2006 promises to be a big year for our industry. The FSA initiative on treating customers fairly is intended to change the way the industry behaves – and the way it develops and markets products. The parallel track of financial capability is meant to lead to a more capable and therefore more responsible consumer. As corporate communicators, we have a big role to play in influencing the new environment – and also in educating our own companies.

At the same time, increased media scrutiny puts all of an organization's activities in the spotlight, and continues to contribute to the decline in trust of financial services brands.

With this in mind, the Forum has launched a corporate communications special interest group (SIG). This will create an independent space in which senior corporate communications, public relations (PR) and media relations professionals can meet their peers in financial services and address the specific issues and challenges facing them. We also intend to cover issues vital to the efficient functioning of a corporate communications department, including the struggle to secure sufficient resources, recruitment and internal credibility.

We want the group to reflect the interests of its members, and we would welcome new members and their input and ideas. To get the ball rolling, a group of senior corporate communications professionals has scoped out a schedule of events which is by no means set in stone, but will form the backbone of our first year's programme.

The Corporate Communications SIG will sit alongside the other existing groups that the Forum runs, and indeed may well collaborate with them on certain topics to gain expert input.

So who should join the Corporate Communications SIG? Well, not just corporate communications, PR and media relations professionals. How a company talks to its vast range of stakeholders permeates through an entire organization, and we would welcome senior professionals in other disciplines as well.

I look forward to the Corporate Communications SIG becoming a vibrant and challenging group – and to welcoming you to one or more of our events this year.

If you came to our first meeting on 9 February with Sir Callum McCarthy, you will know already how enjoyable and rewarding the dialogue can be. If you missed it, why not make a late New Year resolution to join us soon at one of our forthcoming events. Visit the website (www.theforum.co.uk) for more information, or give me a call at Lansons.

Tony Langham, Chief Executive, Lansons Communications.

INTERESTING GROUPS?

There are nine other special interest groups within The Financial Services Forum. Each concentrates on a specific area of business or functional activity, and each shares the common objective of providing an independent space in which the focused and particular interests and challenges of its members can be debated in detail, thus acting as a natural complement to the broader discussions that take place in the Forum as a whole.

Each SIG has a dedicated space on the Forum website, as noted below, which includes details of forthcoming events and other activities.

Alternatively, contact the chairman or any of the steering group members for further information.

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ASSET MANAGEMENT GROUP, THE FINANCIAL SERVICES FORUM

Piers Currie, HEAD OF MARKETING

DEVELOPMENT, ABERDEEN ASSET MANAGERS

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Robert Higginbotham, HEAD OF GLOBAL MARKETING, SCHRODERS

www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_am.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_cc.asp

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Neil Scaife, HEAD OF MARKETING

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_di.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_dist.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_ecom.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_di.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_hr.asp

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_ib.asp

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Michael Bolton, DIRECTOR, OAKWOOD GROUP

www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_mm.asp

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CHAIRMAN Malcolm Small,

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www.fsforum.co.uk/sig_reg.asp