

Communication crimes: Are you a repeat offender?



By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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CHICAGO, USA: Cultural communication has never been more important, according to Robert Dilenschneider, IABC Fellow and founder and principal of the Dilenschneider Group. Presenting on Tuesday, 26 June at the 2012 IABC World Conference in Chicago, Dilenschneider emphasised that many of the tactics and strategies employed by corporate communicators over the past several decades have changed as social media have taken hold and national barriers have come down.

Today, the majority of companies and institutions are maintaining extensive operations and aggressively marketing their products and services around the world. But knowing how to identify the relevant trends, cultures, customs, languages, and value systems has never been as critically important or essential.

Segmenting audiences

While many companies get this right externally, there is an ongoing challenge to effectively segment audiences within ones' own organisation and identify ways to take local cultural nuances into account when communicating. This is particularly important for large multinationals operating in countries with different cultural beliefs and styles.

An IABC favourite presenter, Steve Crescenzo, a writer and seminar leader who has helped thousands of communicators improve their communication efforts, challenged communicators in his typical style, asking whether communicators are guilty as repeat offenders of committing habitual crimes.

Among the crimes he highlighted are writing for the wrong audience; putting across the wrong messages on the wrong channels; abusing social media tools (or worse, not even knowing they exist or why); underestimate audiences' widespread lack of attention span; and allowing executives to muddle their messages past the point of comprehension.

Use simple and logical steps

Needless to say, the majority of delegates felt just a little guilty! But it doesn't have to be that way. Using simple and logical steps, communicators can shape up their communication by setting the right objectives; targeting the right audiences and ensuring detailed audience segmentation; getting a seat at c-suite to convince executives that not only do communicators do things right, but that they actually do the right things; and putting the right tools and processes in place to measure communication efforts and demonstrate tangible ROI, both from an equity and value perspective.

Is your business running you?

Closely linked to my presentation, highlighting how a company can establish a strategic internal communication capability, Maureen Kasper, senior director of corporate communication for Cisco Systems, asked a simple question: are you running a business, or is the business running you?

Kasper highlighted an important point for communicators - the profession is often valued for its ability to handle 'in-the-moment' crises and for creating compelling communications on a very short turnaround.

Further, communicators are often seen as the 'activation team', who put together a great event, often acting as a post-office in the process. But, as communicators at this conference are looking forward to 2015, how many can honestly say they have a three-year internal communication strategy aligned directly back to the business strategy with measurement criteria mapped out to correlate to performance?

Develop a communication master plan

Thoughtful planning is required in this ever-changing age of communication, which required service-level agreements, placing a monetary value on communication activities, and rigorously tracking customer satisfaction and the impact of communication services. These key criteria will help ensure communicators have their rightly deserved seat at the table.

The final presenter of the day, Sonja Banic from ABC, manager of the public affairs and communication division at the City of Mississauga in Ontario, Canada, suggested communicators should in fact be developing a 10-year communication master plan for their organisations.

Identify key trends

In this strategic leadership presentation, Banic challenged communicators to provide increasingly strategic advice and coaching to their businesses and their leadership teams. To do so effectively, communicators are required to step back from their daily hatch-match-and-dispatch communication and focus rather on identifying the key trends and best practices relevant to a particular industry, as well as engage your and stakeholders effectively in your planning process.

It is critical that such a plan involves sound and genuine leadership communication training that will see improved line-manager and supervisory communication with employees throughout all structures of the organisation.

These managers have the influence to shape the minds of employees and motivate them to deliver on the company's vision. It is also they who have the knowledge to unpack complex business strategy to their staff in a manner they will understand and adopt in their roles.

A challenging day, which had delegates speaking about these issues throughout all networking session... how can communicators become more relevant, more strategic, more valuable and more focussed on the real issues affecting business.

The IABC World Conference concludes on Wednesday, 27 June 2012.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

Daniel Munslow is the owner and founder of MOC Consulting and former director on the International Association of Business Communicators' International Executive Board. He has 16 years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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