

A year for communication to shine

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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For many, 2010 did not turn out to be the great economic turnaround that everyone had hoped it would be. In fact, when you speak to many businesses - small and large alike - most agree that the economy only started to shift in the last quarter of 2010. Now, we have an exciting 2011 ahead, which by all indications so far should bring about a more prosperous economic environment.



What does all this mean to communication?

1. Internal communications

2010 started to see South African companies adopt the international stand point that internal communication is just as important as external communication. It speaks to a company's enablers - the people who actually deliver the brand. All the external communication efforts are void, if people cannot experience the brand promise when they engage with the brand.

Given that measurement is moving away from eyeballs to engagement, this element is more critical than ever. Do your people embody your brand and live your values through tangible behaviours? Companies can no longer function on internal marketing alone; they need robust leadership communication and strategic employee engagement strategy.

Research has shown, for example, that an organisation of 1000 people can be wasting about R17 000 000 per year on lost productivity due to poor internal communication practices that prevent people from accessing information timeously.

Talk2Us research has demonstrated that only 24% of surveyed companies measure the impact of their communication. Much research is focused on channels and platforms, with little attention being paid to the actual behavioural changes that are delivered as a result of communication efforts.

2. Consolidation

The last decade was characterised by a tendency to go to market with many one-off campaigns - even social media became a 'let's do it because everyone's doing it', without really looking at long term implications.

Now that the market is flooded with so many messages, we need to stop, take stock, and reassess whether a back-to-basics approach of focused reach and frequency is not the right way to go. Communicators need to optimise cross-platform usage and maximise specific and measurable objectives.

3. Social media

For the past couple of years, social media has been on everybody's minds. And every year we only see a handful of really innovative and success campaigns in this space. Will 2011 be different?

The secret resides in the relevance of messaging, not only the platforms upon which they are carried.

As an example, in the last quarter of 2010 Jacaranda 94.2's social media drive to use Facebook as a platform for multidirectional engagement with the Just Plain Breakfast was a good example of how you *should* use social media. It managed to hit 80 000 friends in the space of one month. It further ensures it offers something through the platform that is not available elsewhere and that this is integrated into the programme itself.

4. Agencies

Agencies are also changing in the new decade. Speaking to many corporate communicators, they want to see agencies focused on business results, as opposed to simply media results. This seems to be a reflection of the Stockholm Accords and the Barcelona Declaration which call for a more robust and rigorous assessment of public relations efforts.

With the diversification of communication into a myriad of niche disciplines - public relations, social media, internal communication, advocacy, etc - strategic partnerships are the order of the day.

5. Economy and measurement

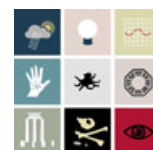
Given the economic climate, brands all round will be more conscience of meeting key performance areas and reaching specific return on investment targets. In a challenging economy, the use of measurable platforms becomes key, or at the very least the ability to demonstrate a direct correlation between efforts exerted and the return that has been achieved.

Financially stressed brands will focus more narrowly on the platforms that give them that return, and invest in frequency - many will focus more on customer service, which continues to suffer from a lack of adequate corporate attention.

As with 2010, the King Report III has created a great opportunity for communicators to raise their profile to a strategic level. For this to happen, communicators need to be held accountable to specific deliverables and measurable criteria.

Simply put, 2011 must be about impact and making a different. A year in which outputs will no longer suffice. We need a year of outcomes.

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