UNIT 1

Communication

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

Before you read

Think about the biggest company in your country. What is its reputation?

Reading

Read the article from the *Financial Times* by Paul Argenti and do the exercises that follow.

FT

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY ● ● ○

TEXT BANK

Time for communication to move towards centre stage

Paul Argenti

The last few years have seen the biggest collapse in confidence in business in almost a century – to the point where probably the least trusted spokespeople on the planet today are corporate executives. When intense mistrust prevails, whatever a company does says something about it, everything communicates, and communication affects everything.

This is changing the definition of communication. Communication today is more of a two-way dialogue and this has been aided by the rise of social media like Facebook and Twitter and the explosion of information-sharing online. Today's best-in-class companies, such as Dell in the US and Philips in Europe, do not just engage in dialogue. They use the latest technology as a source of ideas, opinions and competitive intelligence, for product development, employee engagement and media monitoring.

In addition to rethinking the definition of communication, the best companies are rethinking its structure. There is a greater need for integration, collaboration and partnership among corporate leadership, human capital, finance, sales and legal teams.

Another change in communication by leading companies is the rethinking of key themes. This was the main finding of research by the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, conducted with Doremus, a business-to-business communications agency. It found that the best-in-class companies have been guided by six themes:

a Focus on value and values Stakeholders demand value for money when buying goods and services, but they also expect to see a strong set of corporate values in the companies with which they do business. Walmart, Hyundai and BMW have used this theme in their advertising and communications.

b Evolve a sense of responsibility Corporate responsibility today is not just about philanthropy or being green. It is about companies being responsible across all business practices. NGOs, consumers, employees and investors are ready to punish companies that ignore evolving social values. JPMorgan Chase has done a fabulous job reflecting its corporate responsibility initiatives on its website and in advertising.

c Strategy must drive communication As Jon Iwata, IBM's senior vice-president for marketing and communications, puts it: "Lincoln said, 'Character is the tree; reputation is the shadow.' I'm afraid too many people in PR, marketing and advertising spend more time manipulating the shadow than tending to the tree."

d Shifting from the problem to the solution Stakeholders are most receptive to realistic and optimistic plans, and are often ready to pay less attention to problems of the past year.

e Not communicating is a communication in itself You either tell your story or have it told for you.

f Re-evaluate positioning The crisis has led to disruption in how companies are thought of by constituencies, which provides a tremendous opportunity to reposition, rebrand and redevelop.

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LIVEWORKSHEETS

1 Find words from the article (lines 1–44), and related words, to complete the table.

Verb	Noun
collaborate	
	collapse
define	
engage	
explode	
find	
	prevalence
research	

2 True or false? (lines 1–44).

a) There is great mistrust of companies at the moment.

b) When there is mistrust, everything that companies do is misunderstood.

c) Corporate communication is seen as increasingly two-way.

d) The best companies have just continued to use their traditional public relations departments in order to communicate.

e) In their new approach to communication, companies have been paying attention to five things in particular.

3 Find expressions (lines 45–65) that refer to the following:

a) a subject that can be used in different forms of communication (5 letters))

b) what people expect when they buy a company's products (5 letters)

c) what they expect to see as guiding a company's behaviour (6 letters)

d) employees, shareholders, suppliers and, above all in this context, customers (12 letters)

e) giving money to charity (12 letters)

f) having good environmental policies (5 letters, 5 letters)

g) things that society as a whole thinks are important (6 letters, 6 letters)

h) actions that have not been taken before (11 letters)

4 Imagine company board meetings where directors say these things (1–6). Which point a–f (lines 45–90) is each director most closely referring to?

1 'We have to have a press conference and be open about our quality problems – if we don't talk about it and journalists get on to the story, we're in big trouble!'

2 'Our customers are getting real value for money when they buy our products, and they also have the reassurance of knowing they are dealing with a socially responsible organisation!'

3 'We mustn't let this crisis go to waste! It gives us the chance to reposition ourselves as the most environmentally aware energy company in the world.'

4 'Corporate social responsibility isn't something we can just leave to the CSR people – it involves all of us!'

5 'Let's not keep talking about our past problems. Instead, let's look forward to the exciting new possibilities that exist for the future!'

6 'There's too much emphasis here on public relations and slick advertising. If we behave responsibly, our corporate image will take care of itself.'

5 Choose the best summary for the whole article.

a) Corporate communication is a speciality that is best left to the PR department and advertising agencies.

b) Everything a company does communicates something about it, and executives are becoming increasingly aware of this.

c) Whatever a company does, people will always misinterpret its actions, and companies just have to try to limit the damage.

Over to you 1

"Lincoln said, 'Character is the tree; reputation is the shadow.' I'm afraid too many people in PR, marketing and advertising spend more time manipulating the shadow than tending to the tree." How far is it possible to 'manipulate' the truth about an organisation's character?

Over to you 2

Think about your organisation or one you would like to work for. In what ways can each department show that it is responsible? How can this be communicated?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS

UNIT 1

Communication

TWITTER

Before you read

Do you tweet? Why? / Why not?

Reading

Read the article from the *Financial Times* by Jonathan Moules and do the exercises that follow.

FT

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY ● ● ○

TEXT BANK

To tweet or not to tweet is a business question

Jonathan Moules

Is there a commercial use for social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook? This is an important question for many company owners, who have found themselves devoting precious resources to keeping online followers updated through Twitter tweets, while wondering if there is a bottom-line benefit to their businesses.

David Carruthers, user experience manager at Glasses Direct, the online spectacles retailer, claims that using Twitter is one of the most enjoyable elements of his working day as it puts him in direct contact with customers. "I use it as an engaging way of talking to customers," he says. "We're extremely proud of our customer service here, and this is another way of making sure customers are happy."

Twitter is an excellent way to provide immediate feedback to customers, according to Carruthers. He cites a recent example where he came across someone using Twitter to complain about not being able to get his glasses fixed before an important business trip. He had not protested to Glasses Direct but had used the phrase "glassesdirect" in his tweet, which Carruthers tracked down through a search. "I found that tweet, saw he was a director of photography, so probably needed some specs, and tried to figure out what we could do," Carruthers says. Within a couple of hours, Glasses Direct had made a basic pair of replacement frames and had them in the Twitterer's hands the following day.

But while such heroic tales of customer service can only help with Glasses Direct's profile online, Carruthers admits that Twitter is not a financially important area for the business. Alan Stevens, who advises company owners on social media use through his business, Media Coach, says: "I have a lot of examples of people who are using Twitter incredibly well and thousands more that are using it badly."

Even the founders of Twitter are famous for failing to come up with a way to monetise their ingenious and addictive network. However, many companies use the technology to solve business challenges, such as finding personnel, improving staff productivity and finding new customers. Vena Ramphal claims she would never have created her business venture, Divining Femininity, without Twitter – because it was through chatting on the network that she hooked up with her co-founders.

Her success is all the more surprising since, as a relationship coach, she had avoided social networking sites, believing that they were inferior to face-to-face communication. "I have been very pleasantly surprised," she says. Her new business will run weekend workshops for women to explore different aspects of femininity. The founders marked the launch with a tweet, and were surprised to have more than 300 people view their posting in the first few hours.

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LIVEWORKSHEETS

1 Match words from each column to make expressions from lines 1–22.

1	social	line	benefit
2	bottom-	spectacles	manager
3	user	networking	retailer
4	online	experience	sites

2 Now match the expressions above to the people and things mentioned in the article that relate to them.

a) an increase in profit for businesses in general
b) David Carruthers
c) Glasses Direct
d) Facebook or Twitter

3 Use appropriate forms of expressions from lines 1–42 to complete these statements.

If ...

a) you spend a lot of time and money on something that you could use for something else, you ..... to it.
b) something allows you to communicate with people, it ..... you ..... with them.
c) something is an interesting method for doing something, it is an ..... of doing it.
d) you are very happy with your achievements, you are ..... of them.
e) you reply straightaway to someone in relation to what they have told you, you ..... them with .....
f) you find something after a lot of looking, you ..... it .....
g) you find an answer about the correct thing to do in a particular situation, you ..... out ..... to do.

4 True or false? (lines 43–68)

Twitter ...

a) is the direct cause of greatly increased profits at Glasses Direct.
b) is used wisely by many people, but not all.
c) has made a lot of money for its founders.
d) is used to solve four particular business challenges.
e) was used by Vena Ramphal to find partners for her new business.
f) allowed her to found her business but she could have done it in other ways as well.

5 Find an expression (lines 68–82) that:

a) refers to making contact with people and doing things together: to ..... someone. (3 words)
b) refers to something that is not just surprising, but especially so because of a particular reason. (4 words)
c) is used to describe something that is less good than something else. (1 word)
d) is used to describe communication between people who are in the same room, rather than over the Internet. (3 words)
e) refers to a training course with active participants. (1 word)
f) refers to an occasion when something is seen or available to buy for the first time. (1 word)
g) means a message sent on Twitter. (1 word)

Over to you 1

In what ways could Twitter be of use in your line of business, or a business that you are interested in?

Over to you 2

Will social networking eventually replace face-to-face socialising completely? Why? / Why not?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS