Real-world communication lessons

The book *Communication: Academic Case Studies* explores the challenges of branding, public relations, social media and more.



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Do it well and spread the word, because it doesn't exist unless it is communicated, claims one public relations maxim.

Communication forms a fundamental part of business management and should be a strategic priority, as illustrated in the 12 real-life examples in *Communication: Academic Case Studies* (IESE & Dircom, 2014).

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Cebrián of Dircom, the Spanish professional association of communication directors, the book was originally published in Spanish in 2012.

The experiences of the companies serve to explore the main challenges facing communication directors. Themes include branding, repositioning after mergers, corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals, public relations and social media.

The keys to branding

Communicating a unified corporate brand, or betting on a multibrand strategy, is one of the major strategic decisions for companies with a number of products grouped under a single corporate umbrella.

This was the dilemma facing **Acesur**, a leading player in Spain's vegetable oil sector.

Another issue is the disconnect between how a company's brand is perceived by its stakeholders and what it actually provides in terms of products and services.

This weighed on **Deloitte**, a top provider of audit and tax services, which struggled to promote its consultancy business, despite the high regard with which it was held by its clients.

In the case study, Deloitte considers several possibilities, including the creation of a new brand for its consultancy services and using social media to gain greater visibility.

Change of identity

Mergers and acquisitions force companies to reconsider many aspects of their communication strategy.

One case in point is that of Spanish construction and logistics behemoth **Ferrovial**, which was considering creating a new brand identity and architecture following its acquisition of BAA Airports and the subsequent merger with Cintra. The changes made it necessary to adapt the brand to the company's new identity.

Another illuminating example comes from Spain's leading natural gas provider, **Gas Natural**. Its failed takeover bid for power utility Endesa revealed the importance of interweaving communication into the company's strategic planning.

Three years later, when making a takeover bid for Unión Fenosa, the company designed a

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comprehensive communication strategy to be implemented from day one.

The company opted for transparency from the outset, both externally and internally.

The employees of the two companies, totaling about 20,000 spread across 25 countries, were made partners in the operation, thanks to an ambitious internal communication plan that helped ease uncertainty.

Historically, the human resources department was responsible for communication with employees.

However, on this occasion, those duties were transferred to the department of communication, which became an additional strategic mechanism deployed for the takeover bid and ultimately played a key role in its success.

Social commitment

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is another area that has gained prominence in corporate communication over the past few years.

At many companies, CSR is part of the company's core management strategy.

At **Novartis**, for example, the communication department acts as a strategic partner and is not only responsible for presenting the actions to be carried out, but also spearheads the implementation and subsequent management of those actions.

Communication also played a key role in **La Caixa**'s rebranding of its foundation.

The goal was to return to the origins of social action and refocus on the underprivileged, which led the Spanish bank to reinstate the name Obra Social La Caixa, which roughly translates as La Caixa Social Work.

The organization decided to give its CSR activities maximum exposure through a proactive communication strategy and advertising campaign.

It also invested in new technologies, creating a multimedia newsroom to facilitate the work of journalists. Press releases were replaced by links journalists could use to access textual content, pictures in different resolutions and high-quality audio and video, all suitable for publication.

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Trust, transparency and innovation

A company's media relations is particularly important in crisis communication, as **AENA**, the Spanish airports authority, learned in its dealings with the air traffic controllers' strike in 2010.

Another aspect addressed in the book is that of essential innovation, illustrated through a case involving another Spanish bank, **BBVA**.

The financial institution invested in branded content, a strategy reaching beyond traditional product placement to incorporate the brand into new or existing content.

Examples include the company's creation of a series designed for distribution over the Internet and the sponsorship of the Spanish soccer league, which has been renamed Liga BBVA.

Global sponsorship is also the focus of the case on **Banco Santander**, whose sponsorship of Formula One has helped reinforce its brand's positioning.

The rise of social media

The book could not be an accurate depiction of 21st-century business communication without including the latest online trends.

The case of **Coca-Cola** reflects the difficulties of branding on social networks.

The world's largest soft-drink company has always been an early adopter of emerging media technologies: In 1906, it published the first print ad; in 1930, it experimented with radio; and in the 1950s, it ventured into the realm of television.

In 2011, the rise of social networks led the Spanish division of Coca-Cola, already a pioneer in offline branding, to rethink its strategy and adapt to the digital age.

But is it better to opt for a unified corporate branding approach or to give each brand a differentiated presence on the Internet?

Do social media constitute a complement to traditional communication or a fundamental shift in the approach to interacting with customers?

Inevitably, these are issues that every brand, no matter how big or small, will have to address

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in its own way in the coming years.

Note that most of the case studies included in the book are also available separately through **IESE Publishing**. Search there for the latest IESE case studies on **AENA**, **BBVA**, **La Caixa**, **Coca-Cola Spain**, **Deloitte**, **DKV Seguros**, **Ferrovial**, **Gas Natural**, **Grupo Aramón** and **Santander**.

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