



Communicating sustainability strategies: A double-edged sword?

**A CSM Open Forum at IMD
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Any corporate communications director today will recognize the importance of an effective corporate sustainability strategy, both in terms of operations and communications. Not only can companies face accusations of environmental “greenwash” or social “whiter than whitewash” when they don’t have well-developed, well-communicated CSR strategy, but business, environmental, human and public costs can be devastating.

BP, for example, has recently been under immense pressure to reconcile its communications efforts with the dramatic impact of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. A recent social media campaign against Nestlé by Greenpeace has also underscored how critical communications are to CSR efforts. The use of social media websites by NGOs and the general public to target companies when corporate strategic intent does not convert to action or even when such inaction is merely perceived raises new questions about the role of communications in CSR efforts. How can established companies more used to traditional PR strategies use social media to communicate sustainability initiatives and connect to stakeholders? How can they develop a strategic response when their reputation or brand is attacked through sites like YouTube, Facebook or Twitter?

How to best communicate corporate purpose and CSR mandates has also been a key question for the Center for Corporate Sustainability Management’s research team and IMD Professor John Weeks in partnership with the global PR firm Burson-Marsteller. They have analyzed how companies communicate corporate purpose, link it to social and environmental responsibility and balance it with a more traditional focus on financial performance. The research results, a “ranking of rankings” of the companies that best communicate corporate purpose, will be launched at the CSM Open Forum that will take place on September 30 and October 1, 2010.

At the Open Forum, please join the IMD Center for Corporate Sustainability Management, our members and those of IMD’s Corporate Learning Network in a series of interactive workshops. We will use the BP and Nestlé/Greenpeace cases and our research with Burson-Marsteller to explore how companies can best respond to global sustainable imperatives through carefully crafted strategies and how they can employ current social media technologies in communicating with stakeholders, without losing sight of their business objectives.

The CSM business alliance provides even more opportunities for collaboration with top companies on innovative corporate sustainability and communication initiatives. Find out [more here](#).