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## Communication for Better Business

RATAN MANI LAL\*

*Good communication skills have always been important for managers. These not only serve as useful marketing tools, but now, communication and related fields have emerged as independent disciplines. The growing synergy between information technology, media, entertainment and marketing strategies has thrown up new and exciting career opportunities.*

Communication has emerged as one of the most vital skills for survival and success in these tough times. With barriers to business falling steadily and disinvestment in government and public sector becoming a reality faster than we expected, transparency is what everyone - from investors to consumers - is looking for. For the intelligent investor, the Enron example is reminder enough how the mighty can fall if transparency is given a go - by in corporate affairs.

How can transparency be introduced in a system that has been closed for so many decades and where managing the components of business - whether in terms of work force, finances or knowhow - had been the prerogative of a select few? In fact, so thick had been the cloak of secrecy over company activities that even the smallest and most harmless queries used to be treated as a dangerous attempt at corporate sabotage. But no longer. It is now becoming imperative for companies and organizations to come out clean with their deals, strategies and future planning. With government controls becoming lax day-by-day, companies and businesses cannot take shelter behind government notifications to withhold information that a consumer rightfully demands. Thus has arisen the need for a strong communication system, both internal and external, to keep a dialogue open at all levels, at all times. The dialogue has to be among

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a company's internal customers as well as the external ones, so that a strong and elaborate safety mechanism can come up to create awareness and generate support when needed most critically.

As if keeping pace with this rising demand, the complexion and scope of the world of communication has also been changing fast. The field of communication no longer means the media alone, as it used to be some years ago. Now, communication is perceived as a highway with several parallel lanes : journalism is just one of them. Fields where formal education and training in mass communication are required include, besides the print media (Newspapers, magazines, journals and periodicals), the electronic media such as radio and television, Internet, Advertising, Public Relations and Corporate Communication and the publishing industry, besides the growing segment of Media consultancy for assisted projects, international organizations, in-house journals, etc.

### INTEGRATED APPROACH

Public relations is the most visible symbol of this changing definition of communication. Over the past decade or so, the importance of public relations as a key component of an integrated, all-encompassing approach towards business communication has grown. The proliferation of channels of communication, facilitated by the death of distance and the reach of digital media have changed the equation radically, underlining the need for new skills and approaches to effectively exploit opportunities.

Pervasive influences of the Internet and the development of business webs has made access to information (consequently, knowledge) increasingly easier, and the window of opportunity for effective communication seems to be getting smaller. The need to understand and manage attention in order to get your message across can hardly be over-emphasised.

In this scenario, the trend is to integrate all aspects of communication, as mentioned above. Here, Public Relations emerge as a key component of the communication mix. The objective is clear and simple: to come up with an efficient and effective method of delivering a message through a chosen medium.

There is no denying the fact that despite the input of technology and information access systems, the basic skill remains essential: an ability to express, either through language or other means.

Today, there is a growing attempt to integrate the discipline of communication with management by not only coming up with the data (that is, information in the form of a report or other printed, broadcast or visual material) but also analysing and evaluating it for the specific purpose of serving business interests. Although some might perceive here a conflict between the values of ethical journalism and the requirements of public relations, but it is important to see that there is none. In fact, such integration only goes to show that skills of expression have a wider, more influential role.

Students of communication now need to be trained in a different way. They must understand the role of sincerity, ethics and honesty in writing for the masses. But in a business

environment, they must enlarge their understanding of the information needs and information seeking behaviour of the workers and the customers.

### NEW TRAINING NEEDS

Then, they need to learn about the different concepts and definitions of media audiences, the varying perspectives on media audiences that derive from different social sciences, the nature of the audience from the perspective of media industries, and the different methods that have been applied to operationally define and measure audiences. This is something that has not generally been a part of the conventional media or mass communication study programmes.

On the other hand, business or corporate communication, has been a part of communication programmes in some places, while being an essential part of the business administration programme in most institutions.

The dimensions of public relations have undergone a significant change with the dawn of the convergence era. Needless to say, the coming together of the media, entertainment and the information technology sectors has widened the horizons of the market place, as we understand it. The way business is defined and how it is transacted, has changed. The emergence of non-conventional areas and allied activities in the field of communication and marketing, such as product endorsement, celebrity endorsement, celebrity management, event management, sponsorships, proxy advertising, simultaneous or chain events, synchronized publicity, live or deferred telecast and netcasting, digital interface and finally, e-commerce or business on the Internet, have given new meanings to the role that communication abilities are destined to play in business promotion and management. The change in education and training patterns for business management must take into account these factors as the marketing strategies of the future will be technology-led and will demand a lot more creativity.

In future, time is going to be of great importance as it is less and less of a binding factor, and its boundaries are getting redefined on the Internet. In a future like this, only those strategies are going to succeed that yield results in quick time. And such results will come from only the right blend of creativity and conventional business administration.