

## **Post modern corporate communication**

*By Marzio Bonferroni*

**In Milan, a meeting held at the Università Cattolica by the Ebbf ( European Bahai' Business Forum) on the subject of the current corporate situation became a springboard for various reports.**

**Ebbf (see [www.ebbf.it](http://www.ebbf.it)) is an international association promoting ethical values in the world of work. Below, you will find a corporate communication report written by Mr Marzio Bonferroni, Group Development Director at DDB Italy. DDB is a multinational group, operating in 99 countries world-wide. Mr Bonferroni is the author of “ Beyond Advertising “ (1996), “ Multicreativity” (1999) and “ Communication-Relationship-Return” (2002), all published by ‘ Edizioni Il Sole 24 Ore’, the main important financial and economics publisher in Italy**

Both the economy and company and marketing sectors are really feeling the squeeze of the current crises brought about by structural changes, uncertainty and general lack of faith. This has created an immediate chain reaction, fluctuating investments in communication and acting as a catalyst, worsening a situation, that, over the last few years, has been generating more and more dissatisfaction and criticism. This though, may be a great opportunity for those able to provide companies with a system which is able to offer both innovative strategic thinking and a multi discipline based service menu, composed of modular and complementary communication techniques, that are orientated towards satisfying the needs of a human being/customer or client as far as regards consumer goods or services.

I will attempt to outline both the current outlook and to provide a methodological company communication response which is not only enticing but which is, above all useful, orientated as it is, towards satisfying personalised economic needs.

## **Problems and Prospects**

For the public at large, corporate communication is solely based on tickling emotivity and presenting a show. Today, it is, largely seen as fun. This fun has no link to demand and supply factors which should be its mission in life. Often, company communication is seen as an intrusion, if it does not manage to communicate emotive, rational and ethical content that the general public can perceive or identify with its own need syndrome.

Only by achieving this, can communication be worthy of attention and fall into consumer behaviour patterns.

Furthermore, companies are being forced to invest more and more in the attempt to generate values of mere visibility and spontaneous recall which are increasingly becoming more and more difficult to assess in terms of effectiveness and results.

Assessing the effectiveness in terms of marketing parameters (for instance, market and turnover share), is even more problematic, if one has to define communication effectiveness in terms of realistic consumer behaviour patterns on highly competitive markets, cluttered with brands, messages and media.

If, on the one hand, a communication, as well as obtaining spontaneous recall, manages to put the consumer in touch with the actual brand, then, an important objective will have been reached as far as regards investment assessment both in terms of communication and return on investment. On the other hand, should a communication not be met with a positive reaction but only generate brand awareness, it would risk becoming a merely tactical short term investment which would not be a medium or long term investment, or, in actual fact, a strategic investment.

However, should a communication generate contact and a positive reaction from the message receptor, this would mean that the brand would possess an information and promotion based factor which would bear witness to the existence of a positive link-up to the public at large. The message would no longer be isolated, but possess a relationship content which would allow it to act on emotive impulses and to develop a need to know more.

In other words, if this link-up with the interest of the public has been brought about, this would mean that emotive and show-based techniques have worked together to provide a more complete service than just drawing attention to the product. The general public is becoming more and

more appreciative of this and it also has a positive reaction when it sees the real thing behind the veil.

Both entrepreneurs and managers, especially if they are of the new generation, are particularly sensitive to their segment evolution patterns and are clamouring more and more for assessable communication investment returns.

Pure brand awareness, even if this is considered worthy of strategic value, does not easily achieve assessable results for that brand as far as regards market share and turnover, except for the occasional time that it produces short term results supporting short term promotional action. Today's companies, are therefore demanding that brand awareness contain new elements which give the brand real, solid brand value. Getting attention is not sufficient. It is not enough to obtain an 'I like it' type response to a message. The response should also be, more importantly, 'I need it', 'It's the thing for me' and 'Where can I buy it?'. The potential customer or client should be persuaded to get in touch with the brand, thus forging a relationship with the brand, an even relationship of mutual trust, as is that between a professional consultant and his client. The objective of a brand, as is that of a professional consultant, is to ensure that the client or customer, has faith in the quality, reliability and price of service.

Entrepreneurs and managers alike, also voice their difficulties and frustrations regarding discipline fragmentation. Advertising goes alone as does direct marketing, promotion, interactivity etc. Each discipline, even nowadays, nearly always tries to sell itself as if it, alone, were the final solution. This situation, a great problem for today's companies, has therefore become a great opportunity for those who can provide a multidiscipline and holistic approach and not a purely individual service.

A holistic and multidiscipline based approach, which is to be considered the hallmark of a new, great, future communication era, sees the human being as a receptor of messages of all types including, therefore, brand communication. This member of Mankind is naturally orientated towards receiving simultaneously emotive, rational and ethical messages as the human mind possesses both simultaneous logical and analogical faculties which are less inclined to pick up separate, fragmentary messages, often with a source in various creative sources.

Every discipline of communication often considers the human being a person capable only of receiving its own specific message. The latter is either solely emotive, solely rational or solely ethical, forgetting that the

real objective of brand communication is to generate brand awareness that, in turn, acts only as a bridge which can then set up a mutually loyal relationship with the customer, who must be envisioned as living in his complete human dimension.

To sum up, it seems that the moment is ripe for a passage from the old concept of customer or client satisfaction to the more modern concept of human satisfaction. This will ensure greater public satisfaction, thus enabling communication to create greater brand value as far as regards the brand.

### **Towards a new vision**

To enable us to propose a new vision of brand communication, I believe it is necessary to take into consideration three fundamental principles: human satisfaction, multidiscipline creativity and the communication process.

These three complementary and inter reactive, constantly evolving elements represent the three interactive columns which support a post modern vision of corporate communication. Each of these three elements contains the suppositions and fundamental thinking present in the other two. Let us examine each in detail.

### **Human satisfaction**

Surmounting the concept of customer satisfaction is the basic point, I think, to enable us to perceive a new post modern vision, the roots of which lie in agricultural production, the art of reaching a harvest point,

only to sow once more: This was the root of , the origin of mass production, the source of consumption and marketing, leading to consumerism and permission marketing and in turn, more recently, to customerisation or planned and sapient consumption.

The time has now come to satisfy the requirements of the end consumer, who is well aware of the role he is at present playing. This means being able to envision the respect of common Man in all his totality, as being of paramount importance in marketing and communication planning. Communication must link up with existing psychic spheres latent in the human being, thus encouraging and inducing the latter to take an active role in a free competitive market with free demand and supply of consumer goods as an offer of trade.

If we consider the act of purchase as being the meeting point or fulcrum of human need with the company meeting that need, then it is advisable to widen the spectrum of human need, working our way outwards from that fulcrum. As we progress outwards, we find needs increasingly non-dependent on this fulcrum, but these are needs however, which constitute a part of the human being under the microscope/ macroscopic microscope. We see this structure as a sphere, with a fulcrum centre with many spokes emanating towards the outer limits of the sphere. We can call it ‘ the sphere of need’ with at its centre, the product and the satisfaction of a need, with the spokes progressively satisfying any eventual future needs. This sphere can be defined ‘ the sphere of human satisfaction’.

If this sphere is globally examined, a ‘need plan’ can be formulated, with needs closely linked to the product in link with links less linked, but always relevant, to the lives of a client or customer, almost as if an observant sentinel were on watch. The ‘sphere of need’ can be seen as a an emanating nucleus moments in life and potential needs, a Copernican solar system, where the Sun is the human being.

The mission of post-modern marketing, could, therefore, be that of satisfying the entire ‘sphere of need’ by including it in the broader conception of service.

If the human being/customer/client is satisfied with the company which broadens its horizons by exploring his entire ‘sphere of need’, it is highly feasible that this will increase his loyalty as far as concerns the corporate brand. The dual relationship between the two, the brand and the human being/customer/client, would become more deeply ingrained and interactive, progressively raising the level of mutual trust in each other.

From the initial emotive impact phase on, the fulcrum of an ever broadening human need, other differing and successive relationship phases would develop, the hub of ever widening spokes reaching for the outer limits of the 'sphere of need', the meeting point of need and meeting that same need.

In time, these relationship phases would, by exploiting relationship phases, open the way to increased loyalty between human being/customer/client and brand. Once this loyalty has been established, if the brand continues to generate satisfaction of need, it will of course begin to produce and develop that basic meeting point of progressive relationship building between customer and brand. Loyalty will be such that it will decrease or increase according to that which has occurred during previous relationship phases.

All inter-linked relationship phases are, therefore in continuing dynamic evolution, reaching out to break into ever broadening spheres of need, satisfaction and quality because of free competition. This does not allow the existence of consolidated and fixed positioning and yield.

All is always in progressive evolution, under examination and in demand, and it is right that this should be so if the main generator is the human being and his continuously vital creativity challenge.

The concept of human satisfaction outlined above, therefore, takes into account the fact that what we today consider "satisfaction", as it is the starting point of a communication process, of that "emotive need" which all brands and therefore, all corporate entities, see as the first thing to deal with within the analogical area of the psychic sphere, to then occupy more widespread and more global areas of the human being. These emotive needs, as we know, are made up of aesthetic, friendly, affective and promptness needs, as well as other needs, which vary from one case to another. After this, we find ourselves in the logical area of the psychic sphere, where "rational needs" lead to the need for information, rational planning, economic assessment, dialogue with the advertiser and in depth detailing etc. Rational needs may also vary from case to case. Finally, we will find "ethical needs", thus completing the spectrum of human satisfaction. These needs, present at all levels of perception within each human being/customer/client, derive from the "needs of responsibility", now becoming increasingly evident especially in young people. These needs cannot be satisfied by the promise of riches which is no longer seen as an end by many young people, but seen a bearer of joy and well-being

for those who have had less good fortune in their nation or in their family life. Ethics therefore, can be considered a desire for honesty, clarity, respect, social aperture, the struggle against violence and exploitation, against putting oneself first etc. In addition, ethical needs can vary from case to case. Emotive, rational and ethical needs, if summed up in terms of individuals and social terms, are together the epitome of the total expression of human satisfaction, and are also phases of an evolutionary process which never rolls to a stop.

Finally, we can consider human satisfaction a relationship factor existent between brand and customer just as we can meet the same essential nucleus concept in the relationship between two people. These two people, during an initial phase get to know each other, are attracted, form a relationship, to then respect or love each other forming a relationship of friendship or of love in a reciprocal phase of faith in each other. As each individual story tells us, this relationship is never finalised but is always subject to evolution and stops and starts. In the human relationship between two separate beings, lie the seeds of the relationship between brand and customer, a relationship, I believe, should be considered basically human in nature and not only a trade mechanism.

### **Multidiscipline creativity**

To venture beyond the concept of purely creative advertising, creativity basically interpreted as a source of brand awareness, will have to evolve, moulding and immersing itself into a much broader post modern configuration. It is not conceivable either rationally or intuitively for one single discipline to provide the maximum satisfaction, when one has to satisfy a group of needs such as those defined above as the three complementary, interwoven threads which compose human satisfaction: emotion, reason and ethics. What source and what methodology, then, can provide complex strategic thinking which reaches and encompasses the complexity of the human psyche and that of the economic, social and political factors it finds itself submerged by?

The source of creativity will have to possess a new nature, a new conception and new methodological expression. It will be new

methodology, this, which will have to address and resolve the problem of communication complexity,

this same chaos, oft announced, admired and feared by hordes of scientists in the fields of structural sciences, mathematics and astrophysics etc. Examples of this new methodology, as far as we are concerned, have already been tried and tested by other sciences ; one example is the concept of working together as a team, the tool of teamwork.

I am firmly convinced that only a true multidiscipline group which possesses that humility which pervades the sciences can link up the various communication disciplines in an orderly manner, to draw up unitary and holistic strategies with open minded thinking that sees the whole group need, that of the human being/customer/client and that of brands and services supplied by companies to get a return on their investments.

Only a multidiscipline team can generate multicreativity or multidiscipline creativity providing concrete solutions, with initial strategies producing messages and media tools and vehicles based on multidiscipline strategies. The multidiscipline team, if interpreted as a post modern creative element or as a new creative form, will have the main function of creating basic strategy, to then evolve as in music where all the music depends on the sheet music.

In our case, all the instruments are tools of the multimedia orchestra for corporate communication, with a new unitary and co-ordinated vision that eliminates fragmentation and wastage of time and money.

## **The communication process**

This is a crucial factor, if we desire to venture beyond the phenomenon of discipline fragmentation. In fact, the modernity that has created each single discipline is that very same modernity which does not keep up to date and which no longer provides the solution. Economic. social and



psychological factors have become tremendously important and there is an ever increasing demand for an impartial solution, no longer addressed to advertiser satisfaction but also to consumer satisfaction.

Each single tool is the tool of that discipline and not of the strategist, Soldiers see their arms as the tools of their trade and see in them the perfect solution to social problems just as experts in the fields of advertising, promotion, direct marketing and public relations etc. get great satisfaction from the use of their tools and often do not consider degrees of human being/ customer/client satisfaction. The latter has reactions to false products, to advertising not establishing relationships of loyalty and to the lack of company supplied marketing services or customer assistance. Besides this, the current situation often sees the selfish predominance of 'master salesmen of hot air', in an era governed largely by financial factors and not by marketing. The result is often cuts in strategic investments, thus lowering brand value also in communication sectors.

What could the solution lie? One important step forward, could certainly be post modern projection, a global vision where the whole is not simply divided into pieces representing each individual discipline. Each should be considered at the service of one or more single phases of a single process of communication and be assigned to an entrepreneur or manager with humanistic roots.

Here, we mean a veritable postmodern vision, involving a new concept to be seen as a process of communication comparable to a chain of production, where one phase after another, there is a sequence that begins and then ends, and where no phase is an end to itself. Each phase expresses its value only if it is connected to a 'before' and an 'after' and pursues the final objective of human satisfaction. Human satisfaction means complete satisfaction, where, prior to the starting point of the process, the characteristics of the human being and customer/client of the brand have already been clearly defined following a dual aspect integrated vision within the sphere of need.

### **Strategy outline paper**

To conclude, we affirm and stress that the various disciplines, by basing themselves on a clear definition of the target and its needs, can, by exploiting the teamwork principle and adopting a multidiscipline approach, come up with a communication strategy or a basic strategy

outline paper that, once approved by the company, can provide a reference map, that is, a single reference that every discipline could keep to.

The basic strategy would provide the source for the phases established for the communication process, thus satisfying predefined human needs:-

1. emotive needs satisfied by emotive solutions
2. rational need satisfied by rational solutions
3. ethical needs satisfied by ethical solutions

In this way, complete human satisfaction would be obtained, using messages, media and investment programmes.

A schematic analysis of the work phases of multidiscipline teams following the process of communication would be as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> phase: brand awareness** (+ underlying phases to be defined)

Communication disciplines fix as objectives, impact, brand awareness and positioning as the public must be stimulated to form a relationship with the brand in the context of a post modern approach.

**2<sup>nd</sup> phase: relationship** (+ underlying phases to be defined, case by case)

Disciplines of direct marketing, customer relationship management (CRM),

public relations, promotion, information, interactivity, loyalty. These will work

towards forming a relationship between brand, final consumer and trade.

**3<sup>rd</sup> phase: loyalty** (+ underlying phases to be defined case by case)

Disciplines working during the first two create, maintain and develop loyalty

between brand, final consumer and trade.

The three phases are thus complementary and, apart from the launching and initial development of a product, are always simultaneously up there, perpetually renewing the reference target and therefore, also objectives.

## **Ethics and communication**

Claudio Magris, the great man of letters, has a definition of Utopia :  
“Utopia means seeing reality as it is , by acting as far as it can be what it should be ‘

Paraphrasing Magris: ‘ the utopia of communication in terms of ethical values is seeing it as it is today, acting as far as it should be ’

To conclude, as far as regards new visions, objectives and methods, I would like to explore a new marketing communication concept:

*Brand communication is the human multidisciplinary process by which a company establishes a relationship with its public, providing each person with satisfaction as far as concerns his emotive, rational and ethical needs to form a relationship of mutual faith and loyalty.*

Ethics play a major role, while both traditional advertising and brand to person loyalty relationships continue as the final centrepieces of each strategic move.

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