



don't keep

them guessing!

As businessmen and scientists, you continually strive to reduce risk, clarify your purpose, eliminate guesswork. That's good. But, by itself, it's not good enough. In a world that's no bigger than your laptop and an era in which breakthroughs become routine, good communications are as critical to success as hiring great people. A business plan without an integral

communications strategy will perform like an engine with no oil.

Yet there are still companies that have lots to offer but little to say. They believe it's better to keep their "heads down until the time is right", when invariably "right" is too late. They allow their competitors to capture the communications high ground in the belief that their products, technology and services will somehow "speak for themselves".

There's usually no reason to keep people guessing about what you're doing and every reason to share with them where you're planning to go. After all, investors don't invest in yesterday, customers buy what you have today (and what you might have tomorrow) and potential employees are attracted by the opportunity of a brighter future. But if you don't communicate effectively with them, they either won't know you at all or will have to guess at what you might do for them. And, guess what? You can be pretty sure that they won't guess right!

So, who are these "people" you need to communicate with? At different stages of your company's life, you're

going to have to communicate with your staff and potential employees; investors and shareholders; customers and partners; suppliers, advisors and collaborators; the media; regulatory authorities; and maybe even the general public. Many of these people will be scientists, but many will not. Many will have English as their first language, but many will not. Many will want to hear what you have to say, many will need to be "sold to".

Obviously, you don't need to say everything to everyone at the same time. Communications is a strategic process in which you tell your evolving story to different audiences in different ways through different channels. And, just like any other of your strategic processes, if you plan and implement your communications well, they'll add value to your business, underpin your risk management and help drive your success. From start-up to global leader, your communications will need to be professionally planned and managed to underpin the business and help build its future – a future in which the unexpected appears planned and setbacks become opportunities. At all stages, they in turn, need to be underpinned by credibility, truth and competence.

Starting up in the right gear

During the start-up phase of your business, you'll probably have a name and some form of identity (logo, rudimentary graphics and/or colour palette, tone of voice, positioning statements). You'll almost certainly have a business plan, a good understanding of your market and how you're going to be different. You'll probably need to attract a few investors, collaborate with a handful of partners and attract some good staff. You might know many of these personally, but there will be some that don't know you.

So you'll need, at the earliest time, to put yourself on the map – let people know you're here, what you're doing and where you're going. Most of your communications are likely to be to these few audiences, either directly or through the scientific, business and local media. They'll be aimed at informing and educating.

Growing ever louder

Having established your business fundamentals, proven your technologies, moved your potential products forward, you'll want to attract more customers and partners, more investors, more staff. The competitive landscape will be harsh. Your audiences will be global. You won't know them and they won't

know you. Communications are now an essential element of your growth strategy. You'll need to look like a world player, if not a world leader, so your identity will need to project this look. Your communications will need to differentiate you and position you as the company to talk to. They must be integrated, consistent (but not the same), professional and, above all, clear. And they'll mainly be aimed at generating revenue – so leaving your audiences guessing will cost you dearly!

Hitting the big time

As your company matures, you'll be, or will be close to becoming, a sustainable business, probably public. You may have several divisions, several locations, lots of staff, many products and product brands – and you'll face competitors from all sides. The need for integration, consistency and global reach will be ever more important to protect and promote your identity and build your image on the world stage. And at last, you'll have realised the power of professional communications in fuelling growth and minimising risk. You'll look back to those early days with a smile – "Thank God I got it right from the start!"

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Northbank Communications is a full service communications consultancy focused on science-based companies. Our staff of scientists, copywriters, creative designers and programmers, all communications professionals, are committed to working closely with clients to deliver value and help grow their businesses. The company offers its services through three professional practice areas: Corporate Communications, Marketing Communications and Financial Communications; from offices in London, Manchester and Munich.

Northbank's very first client was Oxford GlycoSciences (OGS). From 1991 through the late 90's we provided strategic counsel and managed and implemented all of OGS's marketing communications, establishing them as the world leader, initially in glycobiology and then in proteomics. Today, our Oxford-based clients include Oxagen, Oxford BioMedica, Oxford Immunotec, Oxford Genome Sciences, Oxford Optronics, Physiomics, PowderMed and Prolysis.