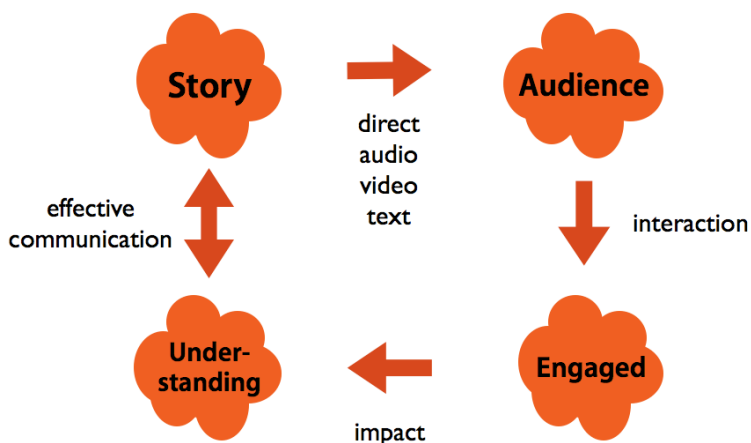


## New Media and Employee engagement

It's a tough business world. Increasing competitive pressure, more focus on the bottom line, doing more with less, and competitors stealing your best employees away. Just when you think you've experienced it all, head office asks you to implement a new corporate strategy.

Don't get me wrong, not all strategies are a copy of some kind of MBA textbook. But even with a creative, to the point and original strategy it remains a challenge to implement it successfully. Next to a solid strategic plan you need the right people, the right communication channels and, above all, the right story to tell. And the importance of these three 'ingredients' are highly underestimated. A majority of corporate strategies fail. Not because the strategy is poorly designed, but mainly because of a lack of effective communication.

What is effective communication? Or, in other words, when does communication become effective? An important start is to bring your message in the form of a compelling story. A good story engages your audience, and they will pay attention to what you have to say. Even stronger, they will understand it without necessarily having to agree. But, once have achieved contact and understanding from your audience, you have created the basis for effective communication. (see fig 1).



**Figure 1: Storytelling loop**

But how do we communicate today? Let's take e-mail, a fast and frequently used form of communication and almost the Golden Standard in business communication. In real-life, our inbox is flooded with hundreds of e-mails, daily. Relevant or not, it is virtually impossible to go through all of them, let alone remember the content. And frequently we do not interpret the message exactly as the sender has meant. E-mail in general is one-dimensional being only text in most cases. In addition, e-mail is not very engaging since only a few of us have a loving relationship with their inbox. Using this medium as your major communication channel on important subjects such as a new strategy does not seem to be the best choice.

What about direct contact through a personal presentation? This is more engaging, depending on the quality of the presenter, is more dimensional and it offers direct interaction. A good presenter can have a deep impact on the audience and can skyrocket your strategy implementation. But let's be honest, how many really good presenters do you know? And how frequent can this presenter reach the target audience?

In order to effectively communicate about strategy implementation, you need an engaging, multi-dimensional and interactive channel that offers frequent contact with your audience.

Enter the world of New Media. Since the late nineties, the web has made an enormous impact on the way we do business. Initially the web offered only a one-way communication stream, but nowadays communication can occur in both directions: from the sender (company) to the receiver (the market), and from the receiver back to the sender. This phenomenon, also known as 'Web 2.0', is spearheading new communication technologies into the traditional communication mix. Examples of these new technologies are blogging, social networks, rich media and podcasting.

Podcasting can be defined as the automated distribution of content (mainly audio and video) to a group of people who have subscribed to the podcast. In order to test podcasting as an effective and engaging communication tool, we developed a podcasting platform together with a pharmaceutical company in The Netherlands. This company was in need of a new and effective channel for the internal communication of their new corporate strategy. They asked us whether New Media tools could help them achieving their strategic communication goals. In addition, they wanted to experiment with these new tools, so that they could also evaluate the potential for external use.

On this podcast platform, content is made available through audio (once a week) and video (once a month) in episodes of about 20 minutes. The project is internally managed by a dedicated employee who also acts as the host of the series. We set up the concept and manage the production, post-production and secure distribution of every episode. On special occasions (e.g. annual marketing plan presentations, product introductions), extra editions of the podcast are being produced. The project started in October 2007.

Key issue of the podcasting project is to produce engaging content which is made for, by and with *all* employees. In order to stimulate and motivate participation all of them received an iPod touch (which remains corporate property) on which they could collect, store and consume the podcast - anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Especially the latter is important. How many 'dead' hours does a sales rep have in the car going from one customer to another? What if that person could make use of that 'dead time' by listening to corporate radio?

In order to avoid a dull 'corporate' story about the strategy only, the podcast was divided into Core Messages and Human Interest. In the Core Messages the following elements are discussed:

- Competition
- New R&D projects
- Connection local/international
- Customers
- Objective settings
- Sales updates

In the Human Interest part the focus lies on the soft side of the business. What makes the employees' heart tick? Who is the real person behind the colleague? How is a congress organized? In a world where we are getting used to 'reality TV' it turns out that especially the Human Interest part proved to be a critical factor in engaging the audience. It encourages people to come back and listen and watch every episode every week. It seems to be the vehicle that carries the corporate news about the strategy.

That of course does not mean we can put dull company presentations in the podcast. Starting point should always be to produce a lively, engaging and interesting podcast series. So even the

dullest person in the company must do his or her best to present his or her subject in an engaging way. Of course we help them to do this and it turns out that most of them enjoyed a free training in public speaking.

This business case was presented by DigiRedo during the 4th Jacob Fleming Annual Achieving Pharma Marketing Excellence congress in Barcelona, January 15 and 16. The results so far are outstanding and beyond we had hoped for. There is significant buy-in from higher management, and all employees listen and watch regularly. Most of them are eagerly waiting to receive the next episode. They have the feeling of being more connected with the company. It is much clearer to them what the corporate strategy stands for, what management wants to achieve with it and what the implications are for their daily work. In addition they learn to know their colleagues better. Currently we are executing a survey in order to quantify the effect of this podcast series.

It also lifts up the status of the company externally. As one employee puts it: "When I showed the iPod with my face in one of the the video podcasts to my friends they were amazed. They previously thought I was working for a bit of a dull company but actually they now find it a very cool company". How important is *that* in a world where a talent war is raging on?

It is an exciting time for communication possibilities. For the first time, companies can have their own 'TV' and 'radio' channel to communicate directly to the employees and eventually also to their customers or any other stakeholder within or outside the organization. Critics may say that these possibilities were always there, also in the time we had video on tape. The difference however is the ability to do the entire flow digitally and by using the internet, enabling production and distribution to be done in a very time efficient and cost effective way.

And which company doesn't like that, in a time where almost all budgets are under pressure?

For more information about this business case or to see if your company can use these new tools as well, please contact us at [info@digiredo.nl](mailto:info@digiredo.nl). You can find more information about our company on [www.digiredo.nl](http://www.digiredo.nl)

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