



Executive IR &
Communications Recruitment.



April 2019

Managing reputation across sectors: is industry experience necessary?

A report from tml Partners from their recent roundtable debate with communications leaders from across sectors.

Contents

Page 2	Introduction	Page 4	Effective ways of managing reputation
Page 3	The challenges of hiring across sectors	Page 5	Employee engagement
Page 3	The benefits	Page 5	Conclusion
Page 4	What is reputation management about?	Page 6	About tml Partners

Introduction

tml Partners recently hosted a roundtable debate bringing together communications professionals from across sectors. We were joined by Simon Kutner, Head of Communications at Premier League football club, West Ham United. Simon shared his insight into the challenges of reputational management and kicked off a lively debate on how businesses best look after this pivotal but intangible asset.

Our attendees included:

- Mona Patel**, Group Head of External Communications, Royal London
- Nicola Ratchford**, Head of Marketing and Communications, AIG
- Alistair Smith**, Strategic Communications Director, EY
- Eamonn Collins**, Head of Corporate Communications, Wood plc
- Andy Rowlands**, Director, Corporate Communications, Accenture
- Mark Hooper**, Corporate Communications Director, Visa
- Julian Eccles**, VP PR and Communications, Travelport
- Gavin Haycock**, Head of Communications, 10x Future Technologies
- Kristina Eriksson**, Global Communications Director, FT

Simon started the session by exploring briefly the background to this debate. Industry experience has long been something that is seen as pivotal when moving between comms roles, but, certainly in Simon's experience, it has never held him back in being successful in a role. Why, therefore, are business leaders assuredly stating that lack of industry experience will present an issue? Communications professionals themselves are less wedded to sector experience being a necessity, so why is it that their colleagues are pushing this agenda? Simon



Click to enlarge

continued to share his insights throughout the session, but at this point the conversation opened around the table. From the discussion, five main themes came out:

1. What are the challenges of hiring across sectors?
2. What are the benefits?
3. What is reputation management all about?
4. Effective ways of managing reputation
5. Employee engagement



Tom Morgan-Harris
Associate Director, Head of Corporate Communications

tom.morgan-harris
@tmlpartners.com
0203 908 4447

What are the challenges of hiring across sectors?

Traditionally, the primary challenge tended to be the lack of connections of an individual going from one sector to another in a communications role. Journalists contacts were the cornerstone of successful communications, and if you built up a great list in one industry this would be irrelevant in another. But this was widely seen as an outdated challenge, the nature of communications has evolved. Communication channels change at a rapid pace, and the contacts you have today may well not be relevant tomorrow whether you're dealing with the same sector or not.

“It’s about the internal – understanding the workings of an organisation”

“It’s about the internal, understanding the workings of an organisation” said Kristina Eriksson from the Financial Times. If you don’t know how to operate in a specific type of organisation, then your role will be challenging. For example, going from an entrepreneurial business to a partnership, or vice versa, could lead to numerous cultural challenges. The pace of change can be slower, the approval process more lengthy and the messaging around the brand much more conservative. If you don’t have experience of the type of organisation you’re working in, this could lead to frustrations on both sides.



“Some sectors are easier to go between” commented Simon Kutner, and it’s relatively intuitive as to what sectors these might be. Clearly, going from, for example, a mining company to a fashion retail business is going to be difficult.

“It’s the stakeholders that you work with – their background can influence where their organisation hires from” stated Tom Morgan-Harris of tml Partners. This form of unconscious bias certainly has an impact on hiring. It is seen as the safe option to go with someone who knows your industry, has a proven track record of success and has built up a network of contacts that could benefit your business. However, in the modern business landscape, this may be what is holding some companies back.

Benefits of hiring from outside of your sector

“Communications professionals can use lack of knowledge as a benefit” said Nicola Ratchford from AIG, “put yourself in the position of someone reading about your business, they don’t necessarily have the sector insight, and they won’t understand jargon or technical language about you”. A completely fresh pair of eyes will be able to break down messaging in a way that is accessible to your audience. “Someone without a background in a specific industry will be better placed to tell that story” said Eamonn Collins of Wood plc. If you are working on your communications with a room full

of individuals who have spent their entire career in that industry, their grasp on how the outside world views you would surely be clouded.

“It’s about diversity of thought”

“It’s about diversity of thought – some boardrooms can suffer with narrow vision, but having a wider perspective is a real necessity in today’s business world” said Gavin Haycock from 10x Future Technologies. Bringing in

Benefits of hiring from outside of your sector *(contd.)*

someone from a completely different sector to work on your communications is an effective way to achieve this. Of course this needs to be done sensitively, and certainly some organisations would not embrace the pace of change necessary, but at every level there should be a way to introduce fresh ideas and thinking.

Mark Hooper from VISA raised the point of individual characteristics rather than professional experience, “if you know how to navigate an organisation and have passion, curiosity and determination, that’s what business leaders should be looking for in their communications professionals”.



What is reputation management all about?



“Are we responsible fundamentally for something that we can’t control?” asked Simon Kutner. Think about the way in which people feed back their positive or negative feelings about an organisation. Online reviews are instant, unscripted and very powerful. You can build up your brand position over years of careful reputation management, but it can be stripped back down again in seconds by social media. “You end up being damage limitation” said Mona Patel of Royal London, “you can’t

control it or prevent it from happening, but you can mitigate it by learning from experience and putting more guidelines in place”. This is what reputation management is now about and this set of skills is not at all sector specific.

“It’s no longer about managing journalists, it’s about internal processes”

“It’s no longer about managing journalists, it’s about internal processes” continued Simon Kutner. Has senior management evolved enough to be able to react at the pace that is now necessary? It might be someone from outside the sector that is needed to hammer this point home.

Effective ways of managing reputation

“Businesses need to think about building up a bank reputational equity with positive communications, so that when crises happen, they have less impact” said Julian Eccles of Travelport. “Embed reputation in everything, so that it’s everyone’s concern” said Mark Hooper.

Timing is pivotal. There needs to be enough autonomy within the communications team to react immediately

to whatever has happened. If you have to go up through the board for approval, you have lost valuable time which could mean a huge blow to your brand’s reputation. Therefore, business leaders need to empower their communications team to be able to truly manage the organisation’s reputation, and of course in order to achieve this, the right team needs to be assembled.

Effective ways of managing reputation *(contd.)*

Comms professionals themselves need to “be adaptable, always listening when necessary” said Nicola Ratchford. You can’t be wholly wedded to one way of talking about your brand. As already covered, the business landscape does not remain the same, so your business has to adapt as well. “Understand your audience before engaging” said Gavin Haycock “and work out what conversations you want to have before joining”. One person making a lot of noise about a very small issue can be distracting. Stand by your principles, no matter how much noise someone

is making, but also make sure you are agile enough to do what is right in every situation.

“Understand your audience before engaging”

“Build a narrative and stick with it” said Simon Kutner. Stay focused, and only divert if absolutely necessary.

Employee engagement



“You need to manage reputation from the inside” said Mona Patel. With employer review sites such as Glassdoor gaining traction with recruits and customers alike, it’s so important to look after your employees. The comms team therefore needs to align itself with HR.

“People are the main extension of your brand” said Charlie Green of tml Partners, “with external comms,

unless you’ve invested internally, the cracks begin to show”.

“People are the main extension of your brand”

People you interview are much more interested in a brand’s social purpose now than they ever have been. They care about the impact that their employer has on the environment and the community around them. Brands are therefore investing heavily in this and comms teams are getting involved in pushing out this message. “It has to be genuine. The purpose has to fit” said Alistair Smith from EY. If organisations are bolting on some form of social purpose just for the sake of it this will be quickly uncovered and turn into a reputational crisis of its own.

Conclusion

“If you try to manage everything as a comms issue, you’re not managing the issue” said Alistair Smith. “You can’t physically own it all. You have to be collaborative, if you’re siloed it’s not going to work” continued Nicola Ratchford. You don’t need sector experience, but you do need leadership skills, adaptability and to listen to your audience. This is what will lead to truly effective reputation management.





Executive IR &
Communications Recruitment.

tml Partners is an international executive recruitment firm specialising in senior marketing and communications appointments across all industries.

In the Corporate Communications practice at tml Partners we consult and advise our clients across all areas of the communications function such as Internal / External Communications, Public Relations, Corporate Affairs, Corporate Social Responsibility, Investor Relations and also Content and Thought Leadership roles.

With a team of highly experienced consultants, we provide specialist communications expertise that is unrivalled by generalist headhunters and in-house resourcing teams. We network extensively across the communications community continually adding value with thought provoking events and publications to help facilitate the agenda for leaders in this area.

Finding the right communications talent is far from obvious and ineffective hiring is high risk. tml Partners mitigate this risk with a truly dynamic perspective on hiring the best marketing talent. We're trusted and connected networkers in the senior communications community and spend a lot of time understanding the motivations and building meaningful relationships with the best, hard to find, passive talent.



Tom Morgan-Harris
Associate Director

tom.morgan-harris
@tmlpartners.com

0203 908 4447



Charlie Green
Partner

charlie.green
@tmlpartners.com

0203 908 4446

 @tmlPartners

 www.linkedin.com/company/tml-partners

tml Partners Ltd
154-160 Fleet Street
London
EC4A 2DQ

T: 0203 908 4440
E: info@tmlpartners.com

tmlpartners.com