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Reputation, Reputation, Reputation

By Michael Murphy, CEO Trimedia Group

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Are you Transparent?

According to a survey conducted by independent research company OGM for Trimedia, a company's reputation is now more than ever associated with transparency.

[Read the survey here](#)



Case Study Feature: McDonald's

An innovative strategy to rebuild and maintain consumer trust in the brand by being completely transparent about its practices, has established a new era for McDonald's in Switzerland, dispelling old urban myths and creating a new story about a modern, progressive company.

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See to stakeholders or suffer

By James Ford, Trimedia UK
Success can be supported by effective public relations, including media handling. Corporations and public sector bodies that are seen to adopt CSR policies fulfil their remit and meet customer demands are all on track to a successful reputation.

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“Sustainable behaviour, whether in environmental terms, marketing and PR programmes or in expansion plans, demonstrates an understanding of strategy, which is almost always long-term rather than short-term. Sustainability will remain the key for reputation in good times and bad.”

Alfred Autischer, Deputy CEO Trimedia Group



Sustainability: during good and bad times

By Alfred Autischer, Deputy CEO Trimedia Group
With 24-hour rolling new media, citizen journalism and volatile markets, it is clear that in 2009 and beyond, corporate and brand reputations can be won and lost rapidly. But what is the point of a good reputation that only lasts for a short space of time?

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Blogging on Reputation

From trust to issues management, online reputation management to CSR, here are a few of the recent insights on the subject posted on our blog by Trimedia's Trend Reporters.

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Reputation, Reputation, Reputation

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An effective corporate identity goes far beyond the creation of slick graphics on a website and office stationery. It is the expression of the personality of your company, its products and services and, most importantly, of your values. Your corporate identity is also a point of reference for your staff and your business partners, as well as for your customers. Your image transmits strong signals about your principles and ethics. At Trimedia, we help clients express themselves in the best possible way.

The long term impact of reputation on financial performance is increasingly accepted and valued. However, we are currently living in a unique era for reputation management. As we face an unprecedented worldwide recession, many reputations will be damaged and there will be a fight to emerge from the crisis unscathed.

Knowing reputation is important is one thing, but actually managing it is another. In this newsletter, we look at some of the issues surrounding reputation management, including the impact of some of the recent “game changing” developments, such as the need for transparency, referencing recent research, consultant viewpoints and best practice case studies. While some of the developments outlined are beyond our control, we show that there are ways we can adapt in order to minimise risk to hard-earned reputations and take advantage of new opportunities.

Trimedia’s reputation management experts from across Europe can be contacted for advice by clicking [here](#).



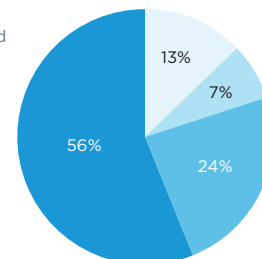
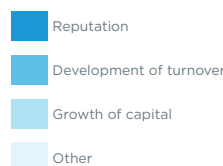
Are you transparent?

Successful business activities are increasingly dependent on a company's reputation – and reputation is now closely associated with transparency, according to a survey conducted by independent research firm OGM for Trimedia with 300 top managers from Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

It was clear from the findings that reputation has a lasting impact on both customer and employee loyalty. As a result, top managers are placing greater importance on communications in strategic decision making.

Sepp Tschernutter, Trimedia CEO Austria, said: "A good reputation strengthens the value of the company and all top managers increasingly recognise this: customers and employees committed to the company help its development and capital growth.

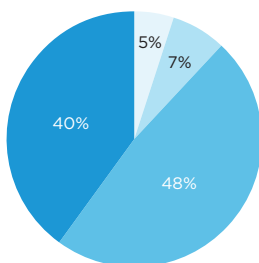
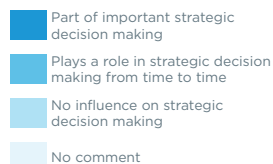
Influences on ability to hire and gain loyalty from employees



"Reputation is certainly more than just image. Image value can either be built on or corrected as it is a relatively short term idea. A strong company reputation can only be established after long term, credible negotiation."

It emerged that not only does reputation have a major impact on employee loyalty (as shown above), but that employees themselves are the key drivers of reputation – more so than the CEO. Tschernutter stated that: "These figures all reinforce the importance of strategic internal communication. All employees of a company are external ambassadors and a mirror image of the company culture, the CEO is still very important but the hype about the big leaders is over."

Role of company communication



Transparency was identified by top managers as the most effective way of engaging with and gaining the trust of employees, customers and stakeholders, as opposed to creative marketing.

Tschernutter concludes the report, saying: "In the future, company communication and PR managers, will have more of a voice in strategic decision making and they will be listened to and valued."

The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

See to stakeholders or suffer

By James Ford, Trimedia UK

To use football as an example, Juande Ramos had limited success in the English Premier League, but his reputation of previous European success and connections mean he was recently appointed coach at Real Madrid. Reputation is the key to being given opportunities.

Success can be supported by effective public relations, including media handling. Corporations and public sector bodies that are seen to adopt CSR policies, fulfil their remit and meet customer demands are all on track to a successful reputation. But, I believe that unless organisations address the needs of stakeholders, reputations will suffer.

Identify & Prioritise

Identifying a client's key stakeholders is the first step. **The Trimedia model includes identifying stakeholders within key sectors: the campaign and activist groups, the unions, the financial backers, the politicians and so on. Every organisation - public or private - can benefit from this exercise.**

We work with clients to identify the key organisations and individuals that can impact on reputation. Prioritisation is important. Individual local residents might have a strong view on a proposed new school building in their area, but their views will generally hold more sway if they form a residents' association. The desire to impact on a reputation is one thing; the key stakeholders are those with the power and means to carry out that desire.

Insight & Understanding

Then we conduct insight audits - to identify stakeholders' positions on clients or key issues that affect them - which enable us to pinpoint where we need to focus engagement activity. We know that on some public policy issues there will be debate and opposing views. That is to be expected and welcomed in any democratic society. However, knowing those views, the reasons why they are held and establishing where views can be influenced or changed is crucial.



Some stakeholders will continue to oppose your organisation. But proper dialogue, the willingness to take feedback and innovative ways to engage them will help improve stakeholders' favourability towards you. With careful planning, common sense and courtesy – for instance, pre-briefing selected audiences so that they are aware of the new results you are releasing to media – will help ensure that comment provided to the media will result in more positive coverage.

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Targeting

Ultimately, some stakeholders can help you promote your messages and campaigns. Earlier this year, Trimedia was commissioned by the UK government's business department to highlight a new EU law stamping out rogue traders. Rather than use advertising or direct mail to reach small businesses, we provided news articles, web links and by-lined articles from the minister for use in stakeholders' newsletters and on websites. By using umbrella bodies, such as trade bodies, the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses, we successfully targeted small businesses across the UK.

Reputation matters. However, if key stakeholders do not know who you are or what you stand for, you are risking your reputation. Stakeholders can impact your reputation for better or for worse. 2009 will not be a year to bury heads in the sand; organisations will need stakeholder support like never before.

Trimedia works with clients on the following aspects of stakeholder relations:

- Community relations
- Engaging hard to reach groups
- Public consultation
- Insight and perceptions audits
- Influence and engagement
- Using stakeholders as conduits or message carriers

Contact our European Experts for advice [here](#).

Case Study: McDonald's Switzerland Opens Its Doors

By Tobi Steger, MD Trimedia Basel and Zurich



The media's portrayal of McDonald's as an US corporate, combined with negative urban myths was weakening its reputation in Switzerland, causing a lack of consumer trust. How could it overcome these perceptions?

Nicole Schöwel, Communications Manager McDonald's Switzerland, said: "The Swiss market is very challenging for McDonald's. Together with Trimedia, we developed the Open Doors programme which helped significantly improve the attitude of opinion leaders as well as the general public. We invited people to have a look behind the scenes, proving that we have nothing to hide."

Three years ago, Trimedia Switzerland was tasked with undertaking a long-term communications campaign to overcome lack of consumer trust in McDonald's. **The team proposed the 'Open Doors Programme', focusing on transparency as a means of regaining confidence in the brand.**

The overall strategy was to emphasise that Swiss McDonald's restaurants are local companies with local customers and local employees which use locally sourced produce and contribute to the local community.



Agricultural fair OLMA* was the perfect platform to provide a transparent insight into McDonald's supply chain

Transparency equals Trust

Being one of the world's leading brands, McDonald's is inevitably under constant scrutiny. It was a conscious decision to use suppliers and farmers, as voice for all messages, and highlighting the company's "Made in Switzerland" policy.

Editors and journalists were invited to visit production sites, restaurants and farms in order to see with their own eyes

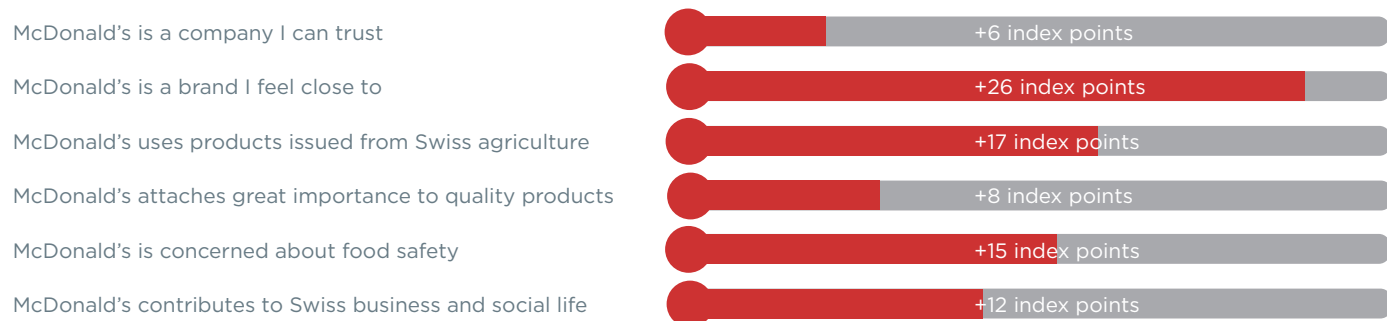
that McDonald's mainly uses high quality food with Swiss origin. Trimedia also set up a "Swiss farmer's breakfast" media conference on a farm with the MD of McDonald's Switzerland.

Other activities included:

- 'Quality Scouts' were recruited from members of the general public. Those enlisted were taken to see quality standards for themselves and asked to provide credible testimonies.
- 'Kitchen Open Days' were held for the public in over 50 restaurants across the country.
- McDonald's first **Swiss CSR report** was launched.
- McDonald's took a joint platform with suppliers and farmers at the **OLMA***, Switzerland's largest and most important agricultural fair.

Results

In-depth internal and external research shows the extraordinary impact of the campaign. The Corporate Barometer 2008** showed that from 2007 to 2008, McDonald's improved its image in the following areas:



Guest perceptions of the menu also improved with "taste of food" rising by 9% and Quality of Beef increasing by 8% (Source: McDonald's Fast Track 2007). During the campaign, guest numbers have increased from 86.1 million to 89.7 million in 12 months. Sales increased by +4.85% in one year.

The Open Doors Programme has established a new era for McDonald's in Switzerland, dispelling urban myths and creating a new story about a modern, progressive company.

McDonald's remains one of the most popular high street food retailers in the country with more than 245,000 guests a day.

**Source: The European Corporate image barometer was conducted in Switzerland for McDonald's and realized by Ipsos. <http://www.ipsos.de/>

Sustainability: during good and bad times

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For a good reputation to mean anything to customers, staff and investors, this reputation must be long-term. It is this same sort of long-term view that corporate social responsibility (CSR) encourages. The topic of "sustainability" is increasingly important in building and defending a reputation.

Sustainability is about having a holistic view of an organisation's activities. It is about much more than the environmental agenda.

A great deal has already been written about how the financial crisis might negatively affect the sustainability agenda. There is no doubt that as the economy slows, every aspect of how business is done is under the spotlight. Environmental activities are no different.

But is it really all doom and gloom? There is an argument that an economic slowdown may actually be a good thing for some businesses.

For a start, those organisations – be they companies or Governments – that talk a good game but don't actually live up to it will be exposed. And who will be more under scrutiny in the coming years than Barack Obama? In his inauguration speech, he pledged to invest in making the United States sustainable despite the major economic difficulties he faces.

Secondly, the process of taking a long hard look at your operations which often accompanies recession can encourage firms to become more strategic, looking at campaigns and strategies that deliver real benefits rather than a number of

tactical activities that have limited reach. And most environmental schemes such as energy efficient programmes can actually save money.

Restoring trust

There is no doubt that public trust in the private sector and markets have been seriously damaged and it is clear that financial markets' obsession with short-term over long-term considerations has played a major role in destabilising markets. By demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainability, we can actually help the private sector and markets regain the confidence and support of the public.

And although we understand that the market has cycles of boom and bust, what we all need to strive for is a more measured, balanced world economy that grows at a rate that can be sustained. There we go again, back to the key word of sustainability.

Sustainable behaviour, whether related to environmental initiatives, or part of a company's expansion plans demonstrates an understanding of strategy, which is almost always long-term rather than short-term. Sustainability will remain the key for reputation in good times and bad.

The article can be read in full on our website [here](#).

Blogging on Reputation

The topic of reputation is increasingly being discussed by communications professionals online. From trust to issues management, online reputation management to CSR, here are a few of the recent insights on the subject posted on our blog by Trimedia's Trend Reporters:



Online Reputation: A New Breed of Opinion Leaders

Adrian Elliot, Trimedia Spain, offers advice to PR consultants on their role in managing clients' online reputation. He suggests a number of strategies to ensure that negative opinions generated by bloggers are balanced with the organisation's own messages to mitigate the impact on reputation.

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Do consumers have more trust in strangers than experts?

Trimedia France's Olivier Lamoureux looks at the growing importance and trust in consumers' over expert opinion online. It advises PR professionals to recognise that digital tools are positioning consumers as powerful spokespeople who can have a serious influence on the economy.

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Thank Goodness for the Credit Crunch

Aby Farsoun of Trimedia's CSR team explores how 'greenwashing' can damage reputation. She advises organisations to ingrain CSR policies into the fabric of their business instead of rushing to claim green credentials. [Read more...](#)



Tougher times adds new dimension to communications

Trimedia Sweden's Mikael Zillén warns companies to have effective issues management procedures in place to avoid have their reputations damaged by crises. Many don't have plans in place for unexpected issues but doing so will have a long term positive effect on any business.

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