



Trust me I'm a colleague

Who do you trust? Mother? Brother? Wife? Colleagues? Politicians? Journalists? CEO's? The Edelman Annual Trust Barometer*1 has tracked the steady decline of trust in traditional figures of authority and the increase in the credibility of "the average person." Fuelled by the explosion of information-sharing and community-building made possible by the internet, the Barometer reached a possible tipping point in 2006 with trust in "a person like me" surpassing trust in academics and doctors in most countries surveyed.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMPANIES?

The survey revealed that a "person like yourself or your peer" is seen as the most credible spokesperson about a company and among the top 3 spokespeople in every country surveyed. "Friends and family" and "colleagues" rank as two of the three most credible sources on information about a company, just behind articles in business magazines. This means that trust in "regular employees and "colleagues" is already significantly higher than information conveyed by a CEO in Western countries.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

One theory is that the growth of peer to peer communication has been fuelled by the sheer wealth of information available. We want to talk to those we believe we have similar values to ourselves in order to sort through it all. Also, humans are social animals. Communicating and wanting to belong to a community is built into our DNA. In a post industrial society, where old communities have disappeared, it's no surprise that we have leapt to create new virtual social networks as soon as suitable technology turned up.

The Stromberg Consulting study "2006 Macro-Trends in Internal Communications"*2 highlights seven macro trends that are impacting on the way communicators work. It points out that, with information being available so freely, the internal communications role has changed from simply disseminating information to employees to one that influences attitudes and behaviours amongst employees in order to drive business performance.

Based on what we know about who we are most likely to trust, then companies who can support, encourage (but don't attempt to control) a real sense of community amongst employees and stakeholders can reap enormous rewards in brand, reputation and sales.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE ROLE OF LIVE EVENTS?

Video conferencing, web-streaming, Skype, MSN have all been heralded as the potential death of meetings and live events. But this has not proved to be the case. We still want to see the whites of our fellow human's eyes, shake hands, read the body language, flirt, connect, share, assess and make judgements.

But for a live event to be a trusted channel of communication it needs to:

- Be part of a bell curve of communication before and after the event itself – using multiple channels, and those that stakeholders use, believe in and develop themselves
- Be designed specifically to get peer groups together to encourage dialogue, networking and those informal networks in which employees and stakeholders have most trust
- Be participative and involving, engaging the power of peer-to-peer communications and opinion – rather than letting the Board hog the limelight
- Build in plenty of opportunities for genuine questioning, challenge and open dialogue. Be transparent - you don't need to have all the answers – far from it. It's the opportunity to question, exchange views, admit vulnerabilities, and share expertise that builds trust.

References

1. *Edelman 2006 Annual Trust Barometer*, www.edelman.com
2. *The Stromberg Consulting study "2006 Macro-Trends in Internal Communications*



egi:live operates from Windsor, UK. They specialise in live, experiential communication bringing together high value people to build high value understanding (vision, strategy, insight and empowerment) and high value relationships (networking and collaboration based around customers, talent, innovation and operational excellence).

If you would like to receive further information about this project, or egi:live generally please contact; Tony Evans – tony@egilive.com www.egilive.com t +44 (0)1753 831919