

RAGAN REPORT

The Weekly Survey of Ideas and Methods for Communication Executives

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IT SEEMS TO US—STEVE CRESCENZO

Shhhhhh ... *The Wall Street Journal* may be listening

Companies that don't put information in the employee publication because they're afraid of it leaking into the newspaper are short-changing employees

“Don't put anything in the employee publication that you wouldn't want to see on the cover of *The Wall Street Journal*.” Have you ever heard that line? Of course you have. It's the operating philosophy for many, if not most, organizations. It's one of those things that people say when they want to sound like smart, savvy PR consultants. “We consider the employee publication to be an external communication vehicle, even though it goes to an internal audience,” these people like to say, in a superior tone. “We have to assume that people are going to bring it out of the workplace.” Well, of course they will. Whether or not they bring it to *The Wall Street Journal*, and whether or not the reporters at the *Journal*—or the *Podunk Daily News*, or the *Nowheresville Tribune*—will actually read it, and whether or not they will find the information contained within it newsworthy, is an entirely different story. But one thing is for sure: The whole “treat the employee publication as an external vehicle” philosophy is one of the biggest reasons employee publications—both print and online—are devoid of any real information.

We're not naïve. We understand that certain secrets need to be kept from the media. We understand that certain things need to be kept from employees. And of course *those* things should be

kept out of the employee publication. We can handle that. The problem is that the whole “the employee publication is an external vehicle” way of thinking is too often used as a blanket justification to not put any bad news in the publication whatsoever. Even the stuff that the external press would have absolutely no interest in. And, since roughly 50 to 60 percent of the news at any given organization could be considered “bad,” that means employees are only getting half the news. And the fact that the half of the news they *do* get is *always* good, you can see why nobody bothers to read the employee publication. It doesn't match what they're hearing everywhere else.

The problem, of course, lies with the lawyers. It is their job to protect the organization. And they do that by limiting or eliminating risk. And to them, *everything* is a potential risk. It's their job to say “no.” Their default answer is set to “no.” And they're good at their job. “When in doubt, take it out” is something they learn early in their corporate legal careers. And that's fine. The lawyers *should* protect the company. But it's *our* job to push the lawyers a little. It's our job to make sure that as much information as possible flows to employees, without putting the company at risk.

Which means, of course, that the problem does *not* lie with the lawyers. It lies with the communicators. Because too often, communicators never question the lawyers. They take the first “no” as gospel. I mean, how the hell can a liberal arts major be expected to go toe to toe with someone with a *law degree*, right? Well, we need to shake the inferiority complex. Having a law degree doesn't make lawyers the experts on what information can and can't be in the employee publication. Communicators need to press a little. The next time a lawyer spikes your story, you need to say this to that person: “Is it *really* a risk to the company to publish this story ... or is it just that you would feel more comfortable *not* running it?” That's the question communicators have to get to: Is it really a risk or not? If we just let the lawyers call all the shots without *ever* questioning them, we'll forever be stuck on the baby announcements and service anniversaries beat. And that's no way to spend your career, is it?

Lawyers think in terms of risk versus reward. They don't have lunch, or make love to their spouse, without calculating the risk versus reward. And, unfortunately, when it comes to communicating important information to employees, they see all risk and no

IT SEEMS TO US, continued

reward. They see the downside: that somehow, for some reason, the story makes it into the external press; and somehow, for some reason, the external press cares enough about it to do a story on it; and somehow, for some reason, the company is hurt by said story. The odds of that happening with most pieces of corporate information are small ... but if there is any chance at all, the lawyers break out the filters. Why? Because they don't see the upside at all. It's our job to make sure they see the reward hidden among all the risks.

Instead of trying to get lawyers to see the reward of candid communication, try flipping it:

Get them to see the *risk of not* communicating. What do you risk by not communicating to employees? A lot. Here would be our message to the lawyers: First, dribs and drabs of the bad news will make it to the work force. That's a guarantee. In the electronic workplace, the employee grapevine is turbocharged. There are no secrets. So, while the entire story may not make it out, parts of it will. And that will be enough to start the rumor mill churning. Second, since employees aren't being told the whole story, they will fill in the gaps with worst-case scenarios—because there is no such thing as a good rumor in Corporate America. If there are whispers of a product failing, or a plant closing, or a lost contract, the average employee does not say to himself: "Hey, I bet I get a promotion out of this." They assume the worst news possible. And third, once employees have part of the story, they will do their best to get the rest. They will waste countless hours putting false rumors to bed and trying to track down the real story. Eventually, they may even ask their manager. And if the manager doesn't have the answer (or if the manager does have the answer but isn't allowed to give it), that puts a strain on the supervisor/employee relationship—another byproduct of bad communication. In short, we would tell the lawyers, "If you don't communicate this bad news properly to the internal audience, productivity, morale and the organization's credibility with employ-

ees will be affected." That's the kind of risks a lawyer will appreciate.

Once we've got the lawyer's attention by outlining the risks, then we give them the carrot—the reward for candid communication:

First, all of that bad stuff we mentioned above is a lot less likely to happen. Second, the bond between the organization's leaders and employees will be strengthened. Instead of putting employees in the same boat with reporters, you're keeping them in the same boat with the organization and its leaders. It's all of you together versus "them" (whoever "them" might be), instead of the organization's leadership against everybody else—including employees. Communicators can win this battle. They can convince the lawyers. We've seen it happen. The problem is most of us don't even try.

LETTERS:

Re: RR's April 3 discussion on objectionable language:

Patrick R. Williams, Ph.D. As an Irish-American, in other words as someone with literacy encoded in his DNA, this discussion put me in mind of one of my favorite anecdotes: An unemployed Irishman approaches a construction boss in Liverpool, looking for work. Sizing him up, the boss asks, "Well, Mick, do you know the difference between a girder and a joist?" The Irishman says: "One wrote *Faust* and the other wrote *Ulysses*."

I think discussions of usage are often clarified by etymology, which is, technically, the study of insects. ... I mean words. ... I mean words that bug us. ... I mean the origins of words. "Profanity," from "faun," or "temple," is the use of sacred language outside the temple: "God, hell, damn, Holy Moses," etc. I do object to that, since it shows indifference to my Christianity, but there's little I can do beyond anticipating the justice of the Rapture (which, incidentally, is heralded by the White Sox World Championship).

"Obscenity," from "caenum," or "filth," refers to offensive language used

to describe the latter ends of digestion and sexual expression. I really don't see how anyone can object to these, since they are daily experiences, especially, one hopes, the latter.

Take obscenity out of the language, and you can kiss Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Joyce good-bye—and I suppose you know where you can kiss them.

"Vulgarity" is from "vulgus," the common people. Again, no American could object to vulgar usage in a democratic nation of immigrants, on constitutional grounds. Truly objectionable language would be words used to oppress a group as inferior, as by race, gender, and so forth.

But a constitutional democracy also includes the right to organize and speak freely. Perhaps the bluenoses in the profession could organize to suppress language that offends them. What the hell – they might call themselves, oh, I don't know, how 'bout—"The Aristocrats."

Of course, truly objectionable language is the distortion of words to suppress value for personal gain. In "A Man for All Seasons," the condemned Saint Thomas More notes that the toady who ratted on him has received a position of authority in Wales, and observes that it little profits a man to gain the whole world, for the loss of his immortal soul: "But for Wales?" In other words, inside every bluenose, there's a brownnose sniffing to get out.

Hey—the Ph.D. is in English Language and Literature.

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Re: The Typochondriac

Sylvia Swartz, executive assistant in corporate communications, Fisher Scientific International. In an issue rightly devoted mainly to Alden Wood and his retirement, it's somewhat ironic that your editorial team would miss "tenants of crisis communications"—surely it must be "tenets of crisis communications."

(Your article "The Predictable and Painful Response to Crisis," penultimate paragraph, April 17 issue.)

SOCIAL MEDIA—DAVID MURRAY

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the blogosphere

Ragan Editor David Murray sips his tea in a tempest for a print analysis of the two-way, sometimes circular, world of social media

Late *RR* founder Larry Ragan used to quote P.T. Barnum to the effect: If you want to draw a crowd, start a fight.

Larry was an intellectual and a civilized man, and so—with the exception of the time in the 1970s when he opined that all PR women sound alike on the telephone and received letters to the editor from *two-thirds* of the *RR* readership—the fights he started usually became fruitful debates.

Larry was my mentor. Over a decade and a half of writing for Ragan publications, I've tried to spark lively conversations, too. And when I've done so, I've mostly enjoyed the fireworks.

Recently, I started something that got a little out of hand, and made me wish, occasionally, that I had kept my big mouth shut. The episode was instructive to me and I hope, if I tell it candidly, it may be instructive to you.

“Do you really want to call this guy a ‘nobody?’” asked Ragan Managing Editor Rebecca Anderson. She was holding the galley proof of my editor's column in the May/June issue of Ragan's *Journal of Employee Communication Management*. “It seems like fighting words.”

“Yeah, you're probably right,” I said. I took the proof and read the first lines over again. Here's how it began:

There's this guy named Allan Jenkins. Chances are, you've never heard of him.

Well, he's a communication consultant with a blog. (Which is like saying he's a dog with a tail.)

One day I was reading his stupidly-named blog, “Desirable Roasted Coffee.” I read his blog a lot, despite the fact that Jenkins is pretty much a nobody in the communication business. I read it because he's smart and unpredictable and rude sometimes. I like it when he's rude. In a vaguely kinky way, I even like it when Jenkins is rude to me.

As he was recently, when in response to a comment I wrote on his

site he fired back, “David, you Ragan people will get your heads around social media, one day. I'm sure. Well, mostly sure.”

I didn't say so—I didn't feel like starting something—but I wanted to say: “Hey, Allan. I read your blog all the time. It purports to be ‘An Oasis at the Intersection of Communication, Society and Technology.’ I've been reading it for a year. And still, I don't seem to have my mind around social media. How long is this supposed to take for a person of average intelligence?”

When I'm feeling defensive, I can be rude, too. And I am feeling defensive. Not because I think Jenkins knows anything I don't know about social media or rudeness.

Rather, because as editor of *The Journal of Employee Communication Management*, I'm looking for The Next Big Thing in Internal Communication. Actually, I'm looking for The First Big Thing in Internal Communication in Quite a While. ...

I went on to issue a call to *Journal* readers for essays on how (or whether) they're using social media to improve employee communication.

Standing there in the office with Rebecca, I reread what I'd written. Yes, I could have omitted “stupidly named blog.” I also could have said, “Despite the fact that Jenkins is a sole practitioner and not widely known in the business.” Or, having established that “you've probably never heard of him,” I could have deleted the nastiest couple of sentences entirely.

But that wouldn't have been as attention-getting as the “nobody” remark, whose violence I thought I explained and more or less exonerated several paragraphs down by acknowledging, “When I'm feeling defensive, I can be rude, too.”

So I told Rebecca, “Let's go with it.”

And so we went with it.

And one of our authors got an advance look at the column—about a



When hiring a communication consultant, look for this official logo, which ensures you're hiring a member of the International Association of Nobodies.

month before it was slated to appear. She loved the column. She loved it so much that she forwarded it to a bunch of her pals. One of whom was PR blogger Eric Eggertson. He did not love it. He, in fact, took it personally:

“I am a Nobody in the Communications Business,” read the headline on Eggertson's April 5 post, over a photograph of me that he found on the Internet. (In this picture, I look like a beleaguered owl.) He began, “I'm pretty much a nobody in the communication business. Don't take my word for it. Ask someone important, like David Murray. As an important editor, David Murray is a *somebody* in communications. He has influence and a platform in an important magazine. ...”

Well, you can imagine where that went. Actually, *no you can't*.

By the next day, more than a dozen communications bloggers—most of them sole practitioners like Jenkins—had identified themselves as nobodies and formed a howling protest.

By April 7, Jenkins had started a blog devoted to nobodies, called, “I'm nobody ... who are you?” (Now Emily Dickinson was against me, too.) On the same day, a store was created to sell t-shirts and coffee mugs with the new “Nobody” logo.

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SOCIAL MEDIA, continued

Soon, two dozen bloggers had joined an International Association of Nobodies, the only qualification for membership was that one not be named David Murray. Even Shel Holtz—probably one of the 10 best known people in the communication profession—joined the Nobodies club and blogged that he was “Proud to be a nobody.” He outlined the brouhaha succinctly: “What risk do you run when you’re snarky to a colleague? In the case of Ragan Communications’ David Murray, the answer is subtle ridicule. . . .”

Hurricane Nobody blew for more than two weeks.

What was I doing while all this was going on? What do you *think* I was doing? I was frantically reading every message that every blogger wrote about me, secretly hoping someone would come to my defense (and fearing that my friends and colleagues *wouldn’t*). Meanwhile, I occasionally posted comments whose casual tone tried to make me seem completely unfazed by the thing.

Maybe H.L. Mencken wouldn’t have felt any emotion about being called or portrayed as (even by a bunch of self-described nobodies) arrogant, mean and ignorant. But David Murray did. Though I maintained a defiant front, my feelings vacillated among fear, rage, amusement—and maybe more surprisingly, sadness and, occasionally, shame. Sadness for anyone who wants a louder voice than they have. And further sadness that they would prefer to blog sarcastically about it than do what it might take—which ain’t much within this field, folks—to get it.

And shame, because *I don’t want to be the guy who goes around making anybody feel like a nobody. I know people like that in this field, and hammer them every chance I get. Nobody in this field—in this world—should feel like a nobody, and certainly they shouldn’t feel like a nobody because some dude who writes a trade journal said something mean in a column.*

Some suggested I could have headed the thing off with an early apology. But because of the rather conscious way the piece was produced, I felt an apology would have been

disingenuous. I also knew better than to walk into the lion’s den to try to explain the various ways I felt various bloggers had subtly taken my piece out of context with short excerpts that didn’t include my admission, later in the column, that “When I’m feeling defensive, I can be rude, too.”

And finally, nobody in the blog world admitted to having their feelings hurt by me. On their blogs they all said they were proud to be nobodies. So what would I be apologizing for?

Ultimately, I decided: The hell with it. I continued to monitor things and made comments where I thought they were demanded (or where I thought I could make an efficient point).

But a two-week tempest, even in a teapot, tends to wear one down. At one point, I asked my boss (and Larry’s son) Mark Ragan if he was mad at me for making such a mess. He told me to stick to my guns. I almost can’t tell you how grateful I felt.

And *all this while*, I went quite peacefully about the business of my life. The people on the subway ignored me as usual. The women who run my daughter’s daycare smiled at me as always. Unaware of any irony, my editors at the *Chicago Tribune*, for whom I also write, were pushing to know when they could expect my series on amateur boxing. My wife knew I was upset, but she also knows these professional dust-ups are harder to sort out than the U.S. tax code. My two-year-old daughter continued to laugh when I tickled her and continued to say, “I love you, Daddy.”

Henry Kissinger said academic politics are so vicious because the stakes are so small.

He might have said the same of inside-baseball intra-profession fights like this one. For the same reason, fights like this don’t last forever. It doesn’t take long before all the possible points that can be made have been made a dozen times.

As was the case here. Various combatants—chief among them Allan Jenkins and RR columnist and Ragan blogger Steve Crescenzo—tired of fighting and began apologizing to each other for various sleights that had happened along the way. Eric Eggertson,

who had launched the whole thing weeks earlier, posted an update on his site on April 21:

“Comments on Steve’s blog and a new post on the Nobody blog renew my faith in people. Apologies all around (well, David Murray seems unable to actually apologize, but he makes cheery noises), and promises to get together for beers at the IABC international conference this June in Vancouver. Now if somebody could strum a guitar, we can sing a round of Kumbaya and put the nastiness behind us.”

Reading that comment, I found the answer to my question: Did or did I not regret having started the biggest controversy of my career? Would I, or would I not, take this easy opportunity to let it die?

I wrote on Eggertson’s blog, quoting from a couple of other comments he’d made:

I’ll apologize for calling Allan a nobody as soon as you apologize for presuming to tell us all how to behave.

“I’ve learned that it’s better to reach out with an open hand than a closed fist. And that is a good lesson to learn.”

“I’m all for debate and disagreement, but I prefer when it’s done with respect, not rancor.”

Gee, thanks, Mister Rogers! It’s a little hard to take, coming from the same feller who started this debate with a rather provocative post of his own.

All that said, I am feeling cheerful, and I am very much looking forward to a drink with Allan, Steve, you, et al in Vancouver. Making up is fun to do. But you can’t do it without a little fight first.

Actually, I just wrote that a little while ago. Quick, I’ve got to check back to see how he responds. . . .

Allan Jenkins’ blog:
<http://allanjenkins.typepad.com/>

Eggertson’s original post:
http://mutually-inclusive.typepad.com/weblog/2006/04/im_a_nobody_in_.html

Nobodies home page:
<http://allanjenkins.typepad.com/nobody/>

Nobodies store:
<http://www.cafepress.com/nobodyintl>

WHAT'S WORKING

Break down the business, explain change realistically and use your powers of employee publication for good

“What’s this department for?” is one of the questions that roams through the minds of most employees. It’s not uncommon for workers—especially workers in corporations—to lose track of entire branches and offices.

Experience editors, for employees of Experian, decided to enlighten employees with a “Spotlight on CheetahMail” in its first issue for 2006. The publication tells you just about everything you need to know about CheetahMail, an “industry-leading e-mail marketing and Web site analytics solutions company.” Think of the article as an employee profile, except the “employee” is a branch of a major corporation.

Readers got the lowdown on several parts of the company, from the number of employees (152) to the “most unusual job performed at Cheetah Mail,” the CheetahMail support team. Digital Services President Matt Seeley explained, “Our support team is responsible for handling all inbound responses from our clients’ e-mail programs. With a team of seven individuals, they field an average of 12,000 messages a day, which can be anything from a marriage proposal to a simple thank you—as well as a few more colorful replies.”

Like most profiles, “Spotlight” lists the topics that readers want to know and gives simple yet fairly detailed answers.

Christopher Lentz edits; chris.lentz@experian.com

Big changes in a company can lead to big problems for employees—that is, if they’re not well informed. Most employees live (and die) by a daily routine. And any major disruptions in that routine can throw them out of whack. So, when telling your employees about new methods and policies, make sure you tell them in the right way.

For *Prudential Leader*, the right way of telling employees about changes in policy is explaining what’s been done, what will be done and, most

importantly, what to expect—questions that employees will more than likely ask. Its February/March issue dished the dirt on a new online database that will appear to help employees deal with an overhaul made recently by Prudential’s Policy Review Team.

Its report starts off by explaining the process the team went through to dig through the old policy and slice off the unwanted fat. Next, they discuss how the company’s six principles will be the heart of the new policy and will help employees “guide their decision-making, particularly when there isn’t a specific policy that applies to the situation they face.” Giving its readers a taste of what is to come, *Leader* added that that team would continue their work to make more improvements in the future.

The employee publication of Prudential Financial, *Leader* handed simple yet thorough descriptions, helping readers understand the company’s actions. They even include a sample of a policy form to explain the new policy format piece by piece and a small section on how the policy will affect Prudential’s businesses worldwide. Trying their best to leave no question unanswered, *Leader* helps readers cope with such a serious change.

Debbie Meany is senior editor; lea.eader@prudential.com

Publications that help employees excel at work are great, but a publication that helps employees excel in life is even better. Going beyond the usual company news reports and “how to be a better worker” articles almost always grabs a reader’s attention. Especially if a company specializing in a particular area can use its special powers (by employee publication) to help workers.

“The Basics,” a one-page periodic series brought to you by *Connections*, offers Wells Fargo employees money-managing tips from “team-member experts” to push them closer to financial prosperity. In *Connections*’s April

2006 issue, Dean Junkans, chief investment officer with Private Client Services, and Jon Veenis, head of Education Financial Services, hands out advice on what to do after college.

Veenis and Junkans tackle a variety of financial issues, from investing to handling credit cards. And each piece of advice is brief but informative. No longwinded answers. No vague solutions. Just good advice from people who know their stuff. There’s even an area about the most horrible foe that a recent college graduate has to face: loans. Not surprisingly, the loans portion takes up about one-third of the page.

THE BASICS

You work for the best financial-services company around, so you should have the benefit of advice from Wells Fargo’s experts. This is a periodic *Connections* series with insights borrowed from team-member experts that can make you even more financially successful.

Start retirement savings with your first paycheck—Many companies, such as Wells Fargo, offer 401(k) plans that include a certain percentage of income and tax-deferred dollars for qualified participants. “At the minimum,” Junkans said, “you should save enough to qualify for the full company match.”

Borrow prudently—Take out a loan only for purchases that will likely appreciate over time. Avoid borrowing for items such as clothes or furniture, which lose value before the first payment is made.

Be a smart car shopper—Consider the resale value of the car before buying it. Remember, Junkans said, that many new cars lose considerable value after low mileage is added.

Learn to enjoy reading—This makes Junkans’ list because he reads, “you won’t be as bored and feel compelled to spend...and you might form some.”

Invest broadly—Beginning investors have a tendency to pick one stock, often a speculative one, and then get disillusioned if the price falls. The one had experience can color a person’s view of investing for many years,” Junkans said. Investing broadly spreads out potential risk and increases your opportunity for success.

Reinvest yourself with one modest purchase—Having a modest income is cause for celebration. Treat yourself without going overboard. Junkans suggested buying a small electronics item, such as an iPod.

Loans due—Many new graduates need to pay back loans soon after starting a career. “These things get out of hand,”

Use your first month’s paycheck—If you’re on a fixed salary, you can use the money needed for your monthly payments to pay off your loans. Consider that the more you pay, the more your payments start, you’ll be ready to send away that amount.

Consider consolidating loans—Consolidating several student loans into one through consolidation is a good option, Junkans said. Wells Fargo offers two options for former students to qualify for consolidation. College graduates often find consolidating loans an easy way to keep track of payments. “If you’re a graduate, you can also look at a loan interest rate and extend the repayment period so you can spread your payments over a longer period,”

Work with your lender—If you’re having trouble making payments, it pays not to allow things to get to the payment due month. Don’t miss that making payments and become delinquent on the loan. There may be certain situations that allow for deferment or forbearance to help with debt management. “Call your lender to find out what their loan servicer’s call center’s lenders may be willing to set up a revised payment plan to help you out of delinquency if you make a ‘good faith’ effort.”



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Connections’s reasoning for the series makes perfect sense: “You work for the best financial-services company around, so you should have the benefit of advice from Wells Fargo’s experts.” This series ties to the company’s mission, not just telling employees how to live their lives.

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BENCHMARKING FILE—SARAH McADAMS**From near bankruptcy to ‘Business of the Year’**

Opening the books to employees helped a 38-year-old firm not only survive crisis but emerge stronger than before

About four years ago, Drum Associates faced certain bankruptcy. As of today, it's having its best year since 1999.

The 38-year-old executive search firm is located one block from where the World Trade Center twin towers stood in lower Manhattan—the very same location it inhabited on Sept. 11, 2001.

After the disaster, Brian Drum pledged to keep all of his 32 employees on the payroll (often pouring his own money into the firm to keep it going) as he rebuilt the business, but it wasn't easy. He says that “opening new lines of communication with employees”—many of whom had been with the company since its inception in 1967—was the first step in succeeding.

And succeed he did. Not only did all employees remain in the same Drum Associates office—an amazing

feat, considering that only half of the small businesses in downtown New York City re-opened in the same area after Sept. 11—but the CEO was recently honored by Senator Hilary Rodham Clinton and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg as the SBA's Small Business Person of the Year.

Drum says that in order to get to that point, however, he had to “totally change the way I communicated to my employees. Before 9/11, I didn't think it was their business to know the exact state of the finances of a privately owned business. After 9/11 we not only began communicating the facts and figures, but we also changed the structure of the business to be a team-oriented matrix that depended on effective communication.”

By opening the books, he says, “I was able to show my employees exactly how each of them were contributing to the bottom line and they became invested in the company's success.” Plus, he adds, “when facts are disclosed, staff will not have fear of the unknown—layoffs, etc.—and can apply themselves wholeheartedly to the process of rebuilding. “

Rallying the troops with candid communication

Four weeks after the disaster, when Drum Associates was temporarily allowed back in its offices, Drum held a company meeting to re-group and assess the extensive damage (among other things, there were no phones or Internet). “At that meeting, I paid the employees for the month that we did not work to send them a message that I was not abandoning them,” Drum says. “The terrorist act was not their fault or my fault and they would not have to pay for what the terrorists did. I used the phrase ‘I will not let the terrorists win.’ We rallied together that day.”

At the meeting all employees discussed possible ways to re-organize the business and planned out how to forge ahead even through such a difficult time. “At the time, I used the analogy: ‘We are all in this lifeboat together and we are going to have to row together to find a safe harbor,’” he remembers. “At

that moment everyone felt committed to the future of the business, so they all supported me in the fight to keep the business alive.”

Drum asked all employees to stay in constant communication with each other and for his part, pledged to be open and honest with them about the state of the business.

That said, they had to find a way to make the business work and generate revenue. Drum took a 75 percent salary cut the first year following Sept. 11 and asked that each employee take a pay cut as well.

“Those that could afford it did,” he says. “I took their word for it if they said they could not afford to.” The company never missed a payroll during the entire rebuilding process, even though they had poor cash flow (mail was not delivered for some time downtown and that was how the firm primarily got checks from clients).

Eventually, the firm's reorganization into a new matrix structure—and constant communication—“started becoming effective and we started closing deals again [and] our morale rose even higher!” Drum says.

Today, business is up over 200 percent from where the firm was in 2002. The CEO says he plans to keep the state of the business transparent to employees.

“Even continuing today, I made the bonus structure much more transparent and showed the employees that after we covered our overhead expenses for the year, there will be a direct correlation between profits and their bonuses,” he says. “As a result, each employee feels direct responsibility for the overall company's bottom line.”

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SPEAKING OUT—STEVE CRESCENZO**Save me ... I'm going (digital) native**

The other day I had a choice between a print newspaper and a Web site ... and I chose a Web site. Help me before I send my first instant message

I forgot where I first heard about the concept of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants.” Odds are, since it has to do with technology, I first heard it from Shel Holtz ... but I'm not sure.

If you're not familiar with the concept, here it is in a nutshell:

There are two groups of people in the world right now, when it comes to technology. “Digital Immigrants” are the people, like me, who didn't even use a computer in college. We used typewriters. We had to learn about technology on our own time, while carving out a career.

“Digital Natives,” on the other hand, are those people entering the work force now, who were weaned on technology. Their cribs were high-speed, wireless zones; instead of hanging out in the alleys and drinking beer, like the Digital Immigrants did, these Digital Natives hang out in chat rooms, where they can instant message 80 words a minute to 16 different people, while talking on the phone and updating their blog.

I've always been proud to be a Digital Immigrant. I certainly appreciate all the new tools (I even have a blog!), and I use most of them. But the idea of living my life online, as many of these Digital Natives seem to do, has always sort of sickened me.

And I've always brought that thinking to my reading habits. Oh, I'll go online for some stuff. I'll check a Cubs score, or if there is important breaking news I might go over to CNN.com for a couple of seconds.

But read online? Absolutely not. Make a Web site part of my regular reading routine, like the daily paper and my favorite magazines? Are you kidding? Build a bunch of “Favorite” links that I feel the need to check every day? Not in a million years. Send an instant message—or, worse, allow people to send *me* an instant message? Not on your life. There's a better chance I'll put on a dress and dance through the South Side of Chicago chanting “White Sox suck ... White Sox suck.”

And I'm proud of my Digital Immigrant status. I'm an unabashed fan of print ... and I always will be. But I had a scary moment yesterday, and I feel the need to share.

My name is Steve Crescenzo, and I may be becoming a Digital Native. God help me.

Here's the story:

Last Wednesday night, the Cubs were playing the Dodgers. Late in the game, Cubs first baseman Derrick Lee collided with a Dodger, and had to leave the game. Since he's the best player on the team, hearts went into mouths all over Cubs Nation, including at my house.

The next day, I woke up as usual, fairly early. Made a corned beef sandwich, poured a glass of iced tea, and went down to get the paper. The cover had a teaser about Derrick Lee's condition.

Normally, I would read the paper before even turning the computer on. But not today. Today I didn't want the paper. I wanted the Web site. I wanted the very latest news. The paper wasn't good enough. The paper has *always* been good enough for me ... but that day it wasn't.

But it goes deeper than the whole timeliness issue. It wasn't just that I wanted the Web site because the news might be more current. I wanted to *read* the site, online. I like the way my laptop sits up, with the screen right in front of me so I can read it while I eat my sandwich. I like that I don't get my fingers all inky and skuzzy while I eat. I liked that I could immediately follow links to see what other commentators and columnists were saying about the Lee situation.

I like reading online!

This is a tragedy. This is awful beyond words. I don't *want* to like reading online. I don't want to be a Digital Native. Digital Natives irritate the hell out of me. They can't commu-

nicate face to face. They can't spell, or use punctuation. They can't compose sentences longer than four or five words. They can't communicate without using emoticons and abbreviations (ROTFL!).

I don't want to be one of them. I don't want to *ever* send an “IM.” I certainly don't want to ever find myself in a chat room. I don't want to send text messages with my phone.

But I'm afraid I'm heading that way. I'm afraid this reading online business is the path to total Digital Native status. It's like a starter drug. Now that I'm willing to read online, isn't it only a matter of time until I find myself out in MySpace?

I hope not. But I'm scared.

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BRIEFLY

Wondering how to measure blogs and other consumer-generated media? Order a copy of the KD Paine & Partners' new white paper *New Measures for New Media* at www.measuresofsuccess.com.

People moves ... Nortel Networks Corp. named **Lauren Flaherty** chief marketing officer. She succeeds **Clent Richardson**. Previously of IBM Corp., Flaherty says she will focus on internal communications.

Job opening... The National Association of Professional Employer Organizations in Alexandria, Va., is looking for a **communications director** to advance the organization's PR program. Candidates, who must have at least five years of PR experience with a trade organization, must develop an extensive network of media relationships. To apply, send your Send your career pitch, résumé and salary history to Executive Vice President Milan Yager at Milan@napeo.org.

Blogging for Business: Everything You Need to Know and Why You Should Care, a new easy-to-understand book with easy-to-implement suggestions—co-authored by Shel Holtz and Ted Demopoulos—is available for about \$14 at Amazon.com.

How to get real ... Sponsored by Lawrence Ragan Communications, "How to talk about what matters most: Connect to the values of your organization to create engagement and improve business results" will be lead by Jack Schreur, director of corporate communications at Herman Miller on Tuesday, May 30 from 3–4:30 p.m. EST. For information and to register, visit www.ragan.com.

The IABC 2006 International Conference will be held June 4-7 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, at both the Hyatt Regency and Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. For information and to register, visit www.iabc.com.

AND FINALLY ...

This headline ran recently over an Associated Press story out of San Francisco:

Parents keep kids home to protest school closure

Uh huh—do as I say, not as I do.

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