



The Conference Board

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# **Presentation Material**

## **1996 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS CONFERENCE**

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**SESSION C**  
**Designing an On-Line Communications Strategy**

"Parameters of Possibilities:  
Designing an Effective On-line Strategy"

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**Introduction**

The Internet is a communications medium that has distinctive characteristics. These distinctive characteristics are the building blocks of effectiveness in this medium and will be examined from two aspects. The first aspect considers the general types of communicative relationships that one can organize with Internet technologies. These are called the "modes" and "roles" of Internet communications. The second aspect covers the specific types of communicative behaviors appropriate to the World Wide Web. These behaviors reflect the "conditions" facing brands on the Web and emerge as "principles" of action on the Web. These two sets of parameters provide a pair of axes that define a field of possibilities within which effective strategies can be designed.

**Communications**

Modes: The Internet enables 5 modes of communication as follows:

- 1) one-to-many: the broadcaster/publisher mode in which a single content is centrally created and disseminated
- 2) many-to-one: the information retrieval mode in which many different contents are centrally created (or aggregated) and accessed by different users according to their own different needs/interests
- 3) one-to-one: private connectivity for e-mail correspondence (unscripted) and for scripted exchanges such as trading, payment and other transactional systems
- 4) one-to-n ones: public connectivity as in e-mail lists, listservs, news groups, chat rooms and hypertext links, and
- 5) many-to-many: peer group connectivity for enabling teams, clubs, work groups, consortia in concurrent or collaborative tasks

The diversity of modes, the ease of combining them and the availability of multi-media provide flexibility and allow innovation in the design and implementation of applications. In addition, three of five modes (**bold face above**) are new,

malleable, allow creativity and can be developed so as to create advantage.

Roles: These modes of communication correspond to three new roles for the organizer of communication as follows:

- 1) Information Dual: Combining the publishing/broadcast mode (one-to-many) and the information retrieval mode (many-to-one) approximates the concept of the virtual enterprise in which every operating function has a data stream to which different stakeholders are given restricted access according to their interests.
- 2) Gateway: Both modes of connectivity--private/one-to-one and public/one-to-*n* ones--determine who connects with whom, yielding the gateway role. In networked communications "who" is also "what" or as MCI's Bert Roberts notes, "The network is the content."
- 3) Host: The advent of many-to-many communication is an open opportunity for the communications organizer to create, nurture, lead and empower groups of internal and/or external stakeholders to advance business objectives. More and more groupware is being commercialized for just such purposes.

## **Marketing**

These modes and roles of Internet communications apply both to Intra-nets and Web sites, but in the public space of the World Wide Web certain additional conditions exist and certain principles are emerging as paths to effectiveness.

Conditions: Brands on the Web face three conditions as follows

- 1) End-user control Like other new technologies, the Web locates significantly greater control of the communications downstream with the end user. Most conventional approaches--intrusive advertising, targeted mailings, captive audiences--are impossible, impractical or counterproductive.
- 2) Unmediated communication Unlike the print and broadcast media with their limits on content, time and space, brands on the Web can communicate directly, about whatever they like, for as long as they can hold the attention of the end user.
- 3) Two-way dialog The distinctively new functionality and hence new opportunity for marketers is the ability to conduct two-way communications over time--with text, images, sound and motion; in real time, near real time or asynchronously.

## **Principles**

To address and even leverage these conditions into brand presence on the Web, four principles of action are emerging. They are as follows:

- 1) Attract Outbound targeting is limited and risky, and Web sites must attract visitors. Yes, advertise and publicize in on-line and traditional media, register with search engines and directories, put the Web address on packaging and promotional material--still, it's almost all pull when the end user is in control and very little push.
- 2) Engage To capture a first-time visitor's attention and get bookmarked for repeat visits, a site must deliver some combination of utility and entertainment. Utility in turn is some combination of best knowledge and user empowerment; entertainment, some combination of brand positioning and user interactivity.
- 3) Listen Developing the new opportunity for marketers--two-way communications over time--may be a cultural challenge. Management generally and marketing especially are oriented to outbound messaging. Learning's benefits and listening's best practices are just now emerging and in various guides--in the concepts of total quality, build-to-order, value-chain integration, concurrent process design just to name a few. Beyond cybernetic feedback, the marketing opportunity is to optimize the return path in two-way relationship.
- 4) Assemble The ability to gather groups of external stakeholders around their own shared interests--to nurture, guide, probe, listen to and even empower these groups--can be used to advance a wide variety of business objectives. Forming and empowering stakeholder groups is a high risk/high reward enterprise. Unfortunately this may be unavoidable on the Web where stakeholder groups can and do, all too easily, form and empower themselves.

### **Summary**

As a communications toolkit, the Internet enables five "modes" of communication and three corresponding "roles" for the organizers of those communications. These modes and roles apply both to Intra-nets and public Web sites. For establishing brand presence on the Web, the Web presents brands with three distinctive "conditions" and four "principles" for action. These two sets of parameters--the modes and roles of Internet communications and the conditions and principles of Web presence--are the building blocks of possibilities from within which effective on-line strategies are designed.