



LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF PURPOSE


FOURTOLD

EACD EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION
DIRECTORS



HOW TODAY'S LEADERS ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO TALK ABOUT ESG

Over the past few years, we have witnessed huge changes across society. Financial crises, global pandemics and now war in Europe have all brought about far-reaching and unforeseeable consequences. The exponential evolution of technology is also disrupting how we live, work, socialise, and consume. The world is changing and it is doing so at breakneck speed.

As corporate communications professionals, we have seen this change first hand. Feeding press releases into fax machines in the late 1990s is but a distant memory. Back then, you could manage an organisation's reputation with a "command and control" approach. There were very few channels, so the emphasis tended to be on message control.

Today, the world is different. The boundaries of organisations are more porous and there is a huge array of touchpoints between any organisation and its audiences. In this environment, reputation management is not just about the message, instead it's about grounding that message in purpose-led action.

At the same time, consumers everywhere are aware of the huge challenges facing the world, with climate change foremost among them. These consumers expect those in a position of power to act and if not, they will vote with their feet - and their wallets.

It's no surprise then that today's business leaders understand the need for organisational purpose to be grounded in a response to these issues. Many also understand that articulating this purpose can bring plenty of rewards, both for themselves and

their organisations. A strong personal brand, an enhanced corporate reputation, and the ability to attract better, more engaged employees can all lead to a stronger top and bottom line. Social media, with its personal tone, direct audience, and opportunities for engagement, is the ideal platform for communicating this purpose.

We are seeing increased demand from our clients for support with CEO and executive social media profiling with a focus on purpose, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues as they align with various targets including UN SDGs and NetZero, and in response to an increase in mandatory ESG reporting. This is an area of the communications mix that is growing in importance but which remains underexplored. For communicators, it presents opportunities but is also fraught with dangers. That's why we partnered with EACD to undertake research on the topic and start a conversation within our professional community.

We hope this is helpful and would be delighted to hear from fellow professionals about their experiences and perspectives.



MATTHEW WILLIS,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

On behalf of the EACD, I would like to thank Fourtold for conducting this research within our community. With increasing importance placed on corporate transparency and accountability, effectively engaging with stakeholders on ESG issues can help drive sustainability strategies, that in turn can positively impact the global agenda on issues like the climate crisis and inequality.

Underpinning this trend is the growing number of organisations and businesses recognising the value of working towards the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically their potential to protect and enhance their license to operate, innovate and grow. As a collection of 17 interlinked global goals set up in 2015, the SDGs are designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030, to address global challenges including those related to inequality, poverty, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

As a new ethical social contract, the UN Global Compact¹ asks companies to first do business responsibly and then pursue opportunities to solve societal challenges through business innovation and collaboration. According to the SDG Compass (the guide for business on the SDGs), the aim is to redirect global public and private investment flows towards the challenges they represent. This will further grow markets and ease access to capital for companies that can offer relevant technologies and solutions through sustainable and inclusive business models.

All companies can play a role no matter how large or small, regardless of their industry. The scale and scope of the global goals are unprecedented, but businesses are

uniquely placed to contribute by engaging with consumers and their supply chains. And transparency is fast becoming the new paradigm for conducting business. It underlies Target 12.6 of the SDGs - to encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability information into their reporting.

The motivation behind businesses and organisations aligning with the SDG's are diverse, but they certainly provide a common global language. And, when companies rally behind the same goals it is easier to make progress and find partnerships between actors that might not otherwise have been possible. Effective and strategic stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in ensuring successful collaboration and outcomes on this.

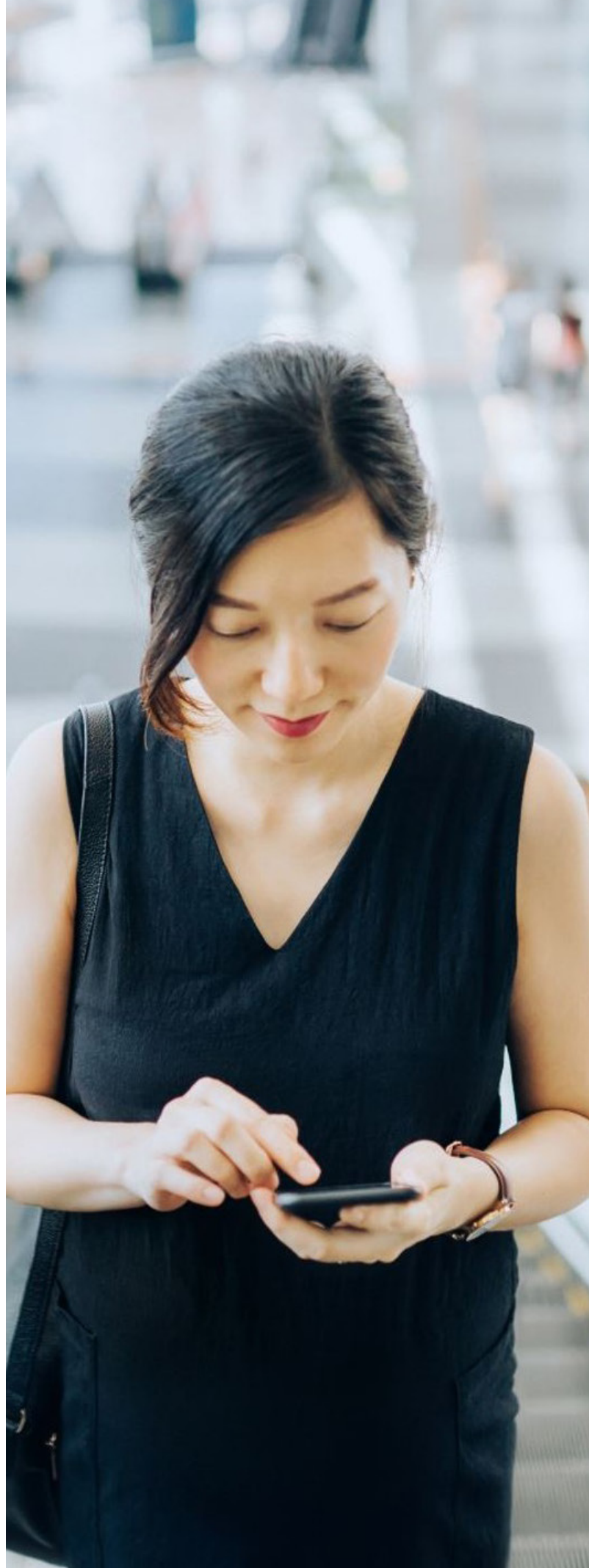
In working towards the SDGs, companies, organisations, and new partnerships and business models are driving the change our societies need to not only survive but thrive. From small to big corporations, being a good sustainable global 'citizen' and communicating that fact can only have a positive impact. And from the inside out, from internal to external communication, our discipline is responding by evolving to adapt to the new technologies – including social media platforms - that shape and improve the way we communicate.



RUI VERAS,
EACD BOARD

¹The UN Global Compact is a voluntary initiative based on CEO commitments to implement universal sustainability principles and to undertake partnerships in support of UN goals.

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ABOUT THE REPORT AUTHORS

Fourtold offers integrated and creative strategic communications and public affairs consultancy, from bases in Oxford, London, and Brussels. Our purpose is to help build and maintain trust in the science and technology that can tackle the global issues of our time.

Our aim is to become the strategic consultancy of choice for world-class innovative businesses, and - through the application of our communications expertise and our understanding of technology and science - create, maintain, and enhance their reputation, relevance, and trust placed in them by stakeholders.

The European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) is Europe's largest and best-known network for senior communication leaders to meet, share insights and influence the direction of the communications discipline. Its members are located throughout Europe, with smaller groups also active in the Middle East, the US, and Asia. Its aim is to attract, inspire and engage current and future communications leaders to drive excellence in the comms profession.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

In our joint research project with the European Association of Communications Directors (EACD), we spoke to communications professionals from around the world to find out what their organisations understood about the importance of ESG issues and the need to engage with stakeholders about these issues.

We particularly wanted to understand how businesses, organisations, and their senior executives are using social media to show leadership on the critical ESG issues of the day; to find out about their experiences, the hurdles they've encountered along the way, and the extent to which employees are traveling with them on their ESG journey.

The findings contained within this report will:

- help communications professionals benchmark their progress on communicating about ESG issues and purpose on social media.
- give perspective on potential stumbling blocks.
- provide pointers to consider and adopt in working towards achieving better stakeholder engagement.

The research first seeks to get an idea of how companies are using social media day-to-day, to engage with stakeholders. This baseline then allows us to better assess how well executives are using social platforms to engage on ESG issues and their organisation's purpose.

METHODOLOGY

EACD and Fourtold surveyed 108 communications professionals located around the world². The respondents work across a range of sectors including – but not limited to – technology, media, food and beverage, manufacturing, and pharmaceuticals. Over one third of respondents work at organisations employing in excess of 5,000 people. The remainder work for smaller companies.

As part of a joint Fourtold / EACD panel discussion on the subject, we invited guests Nicki Allitt, Vice President Group Communications, ISS, and Nicole Gorfer, Senior Global Corporate Affairs and People Leader, of Roche (and EACD board member)³, to join us. We thank them for their generosity of time and invaluable insights and have included a number of their quotes within this report.

²The research was undertaken towards the end of 2021

³Nicole Gorfer has since joined Adecco as its SVP Communications

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Businesses, organisations, and their senior executives are on a journey – to meet growing expectations to take action on and talk about critical ESG issues, while understanding and leveraging the value of using social media as a powerful way to engage with these audiences - helping to protect and grow, corporate reputation, employer, and political brands.

Our research on how they are navigating this, presents a mixed bag.

Senior execs are holding back on using social media platforms to engage with stakeholders

- An overwhelming 86% of respondents were confident that, overall, their employer was fairly or very active in using social media to update stakeholders with corporate news and views. But only 51% could say the same of their senior executive colleagues.
- Just over half of respondents reported a recent increase, in their senior execs' activity on social, with 65% attributing this to meeting growing stakeholder expectations for companies to engage.
- Nearly 80% of respondents stated that LinkedIn was their senior execs' social media platform of choice for business.

Purpose and ESG have become guiding themes for corporate engagement

- Despite a growing need for organisations to protect and build their brand by leading the conversation on environmental, societal, and governance issues, senior execs are held back by a mix of factors, with time given as the key reason by 62% of respondents and a quarter also citing fear of exposure/embarrassment.
- Over a third (38%) of senior execs choose to - or are left to - handle their own personal (for business) social media accounts. This may be down to personal choice, time, or the fact that – together – comms teams and senior execs lack experience or the confidence in knowing how to begin communicating via 'personal' social media handles.
- ESG issues are increasingly important to employees with plenty of available evidence to show that engaged employees are happier and more productive. However, around a fifth (21%) of the comms professionals we asked said that their colleagues are not engaged with their employer's social media activity. The same number report that their colleagues have little or no understanding of the ESG issues critical to their employer's business and are not confident that their employer has a clear ESG story to tell.

- Meanwhile, three-quarters of the comms professionals we asked believe it to be very important that stakeholders and audiences understand a organisation's ESG ambitions and activities. And nearly 80% are aware of increasing internal and external stakeholder focus on ESG issues.
- It is not surprising then, that the majority (74%) of communications professionals responsible for protecting and developing the reputation of their organisations, want to see more engagement on ESG issues using social media.

Despite this, a significant number of organisations are still not engaging with purpose and ESG

- Less than half of respondents confirmed that their employers had identified the ESG issues facing them, with just under 40% reporting that their organisation had not conducted any kind of materiality study to help with this. This is surprising, given an increasingly complex and nuanced ESG landscape.
- It is also a concern that 16% of comms professionals reported that ESG issues are at the bottom of their employer's organisational priority list, particularly given the growing recognition of the importance of ESG issues to stakeholders, including consumers, employees, shareholders, and legislators.



THE REPORT'S FINDINGS IN DETAIL

HOW SENIOR EXECUTIVES ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Despite the ubiquity of social media in our lives and its value as a tool for corporate communication, our research findings paint a mixed picture of how active executives are in using the various social media platforms.

Just over half of our respondents reported that their colleagues at senior executive level are fairly or very active on social media, with a similar number (54%) saying that these same execs have increased their social media activity over the past three years.

This seems relatively low given the prominence of social media, as one of the few ways for businesses to communicate directly with employees and other stakeholders during various global lockdowns. Taking this into consideration, it feels even more significant that nearly half of respondents (48%) reported that their senior execs were either not very active or active in any way on social media.

Over three-quarters (78%) of respondents report that LinkedIn is the social media platform of choice for their senior execs, followed by Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The popularity of LinkedIn is likely due to executives having the freedom to publish in-depth opinions, and an ability to control both the message and timing.

Reasons for the recent increase in social media use by execs include the need to:

- Meet growing stakeholders' expectations for engagement (65%).
- Respond to the increasing online presence of competitors (21%).
- Attract the best talent in a highly competitive market (9%).
- Respond and communicate about issues raised by the Covid19 pandemic (5%).

“

Our executive thought leadership is a key part of our strategic communications, helping to protect and build our reputation, and social media is the leading channel we use to amplify this. It gives us control of the message/s, is easy to use, timely and complementary to the other channels we use. In particular, using LinkedIn allows our senior execs to talk about various issues in-depth, grounded in evidence and with passion.

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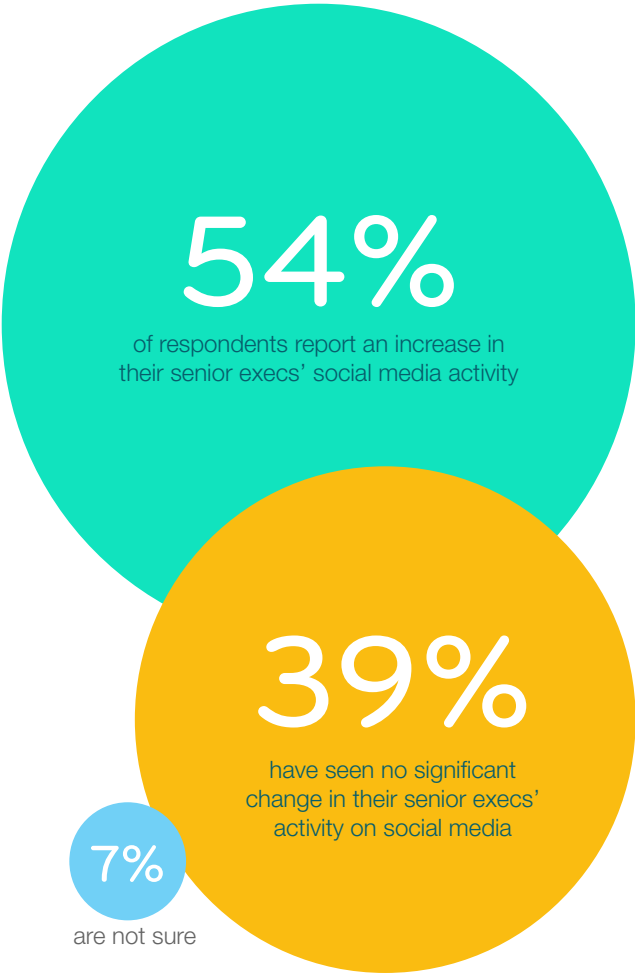


NICKI ALLITT, VICE
PRESIDENT GROUP
COMMS, ISS

Overall, the vast majority of survey respondents do recognise the value of engaging with stakeholders on social media.

This is evidenced by the fact that 86% of respondents described their companies as being either fairly or very active on social platforms. However, a significant minority of businesses still don't use social to engage with their stakeholders, with 14% saying that their company was not very active or active in any way.

Question: In your opinion, which of these statements best describes the overall trend in your senior executives' social media activity over the past three years?



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There is a growing expectation that brands engage with their various audiences about ESG issues. So, it's surprising that a significant minority of companies either don't think that engaging on social is important enough or haven't got around to it as a priority.

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MATTHEW WILLIS,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

“

Perhaps the most important job for senior execs over the past two years has been to engage, reassure, motivate and inspire employees during a time of great change.

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CHRISTINA FEE,
DIRECTOR, FORTOLD

IS THE C-SUITE TOO AFRAID TO POST?

A significant reason given by respondents for why their senior executive colleagues don't engage more on social media was fear of the 'court of public opinion', with nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) highlighting concern about attracting negative attention as a factor. With the rise of cancel culture and social media 'pile-ons' (whether deserved or not), it's not surprising that some execs are reluctant to dip their toe into the world of social media – especially when one misjudged tweet can 'tank' a company's share price, create a media storm, or send customers fleeing to a competitor brand – sometimes all at once.

Over 40% of respondents gave lack of time as the main reason for their company's senior executives not being more active on social. Again, hardly surprising given the busy schedules of most executives. Lack of information and support, and resources were also highlighted (19% and 15% respectively).

These barriers to social media engagement perhaps go some way to explaining why around half of all the businesses referred to in our research don't have a formal social media plan for their senior execs.



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Engaging with key stakeholders on social can often be viewed as a 'soft' management responsibility, one that is expendable, if time and resources are tight.

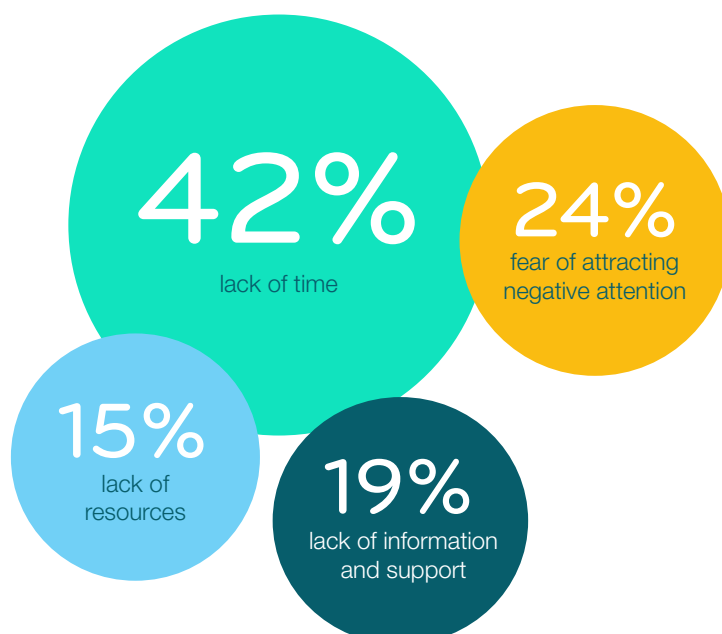
It's perfectly understandable to want to steer clear of communicating about something that may potentially wrong foot you, but CEOs must have a voice on social – to demonstrate purpose, passion, authenticity, and openness.

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ADAM POWELL,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

Question: In your opinion, which of these statements best describes barriers to your senior executives' being more active on social media?



Our research found that well over a third (38%) of senior executives choose to - or are left to - handle their own personal (for business) social media accounts.

This may be a personal choice, where execs are reluctant to allow communications professionals to speak on their behalf. Time is also a factor so it's possible that creating plans for senior execs is a bridge too far. Or it may simply be down to the fact that, together, comms teams and senior execs struggle to know where to begin communicating via "personal" social media handles.

Where social media plans do exist, 52% of respondents say that they have a formal social media strategy in place for their senior executives, with 61% reporting that it is managed by an in-house communications team.

Almost no-one outsources management of their senior execs' personal accounts to an external agency (1%).

“

Social media platforms are now often the first place that stakeholders 'meet' a company and, so what the CEO and executive team say about their personal values and the values of their organisation is critically important and must be carefully thought through – in terms of reach, impact, and consequence.

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MATTHEW WILLIS,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

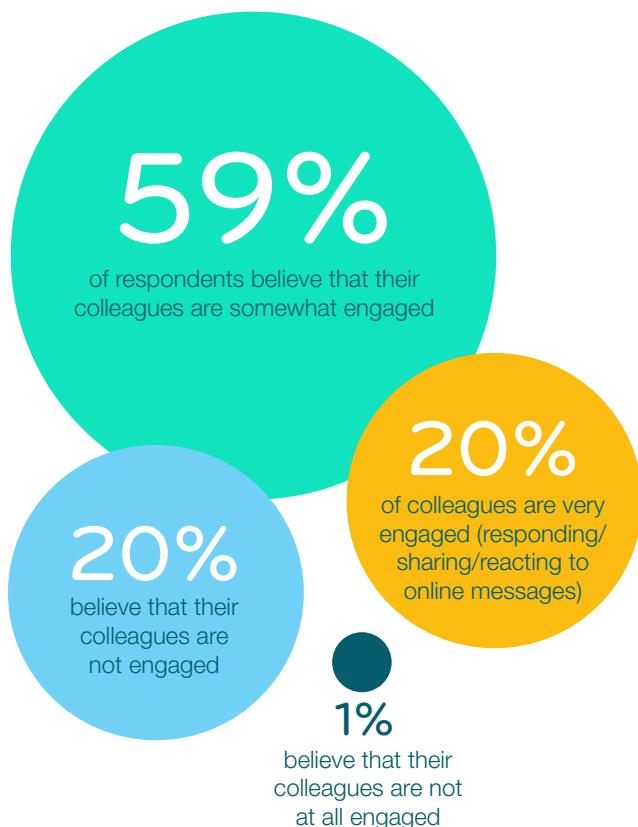


ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

DO EMPLOYEES CARE WHAT THEIR SENIOR EXECS ARE SAYING ON SOCIAL?

Our research revealed a broad range of responses to the question we posed on this. Over 20% of respondents reported that the employees in their organisation don't feel engaged with what their senior execs are saying on social. On the flip side, the same number believe that their colleagues are very engaged with their organisation's social media output. Nearly 60% of respondents place their colleagues somewhere in the middle.

Question: In your opinion, how engaged are employees with your organisation's social media activity?



The varying levels of engagement recorded in the research could be attributed to several factors. Demographics may play a role where younger workers are more engaged in social media, or quality and quantity of posts could be a determining factor. However, in the end, if output is low, or engagement from the execs themselves is unenthusiastic, this response will be mirrored back by employees.

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Ultimately the fact that such a significant percentage of employees don't feel engaged with what their execs are saying on social raises questions about the impact this may have on retention and productivity levels.

Employees who do feel engaged will not only be more satisfied in their work but are also more likely to be more productive.

This mutual gains view of motivation and people management lies at the heart of employee engagement.

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CHRISTINA FEE,
DIRECTOR, FORTOLD

ESG AS A REPUTATIONAL RISK FACTOR

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND PURPOSE

In recent years, ESG issues have climbed to the top of the agenda for senior execs. Social movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have grabbed society's attention while political populists have put the question of the economic settlement back on the agenda. At the same time, the climate crisis has accelerated, with global citizens more focused than ever on environmental issues. More recently the war in Ukraine has also put brands that continue to operate in Russia in the crosshairs of stakeholders.

Businesses and brands have been forced to adapt – and purpose-led action is now an imperative, as a means to protect and grow a business, while attracting and retaining the best quality of candidates. Purpose and ESG have become central themes for corporate communications in today's world. However, there can be a considerable risk for businesses and brands who choose to engage on these topics, especially in the sometimes-febrile world of social media.

Having established the extent to which senior execs are using social media, we now turn to the question of whether and how they are proactively communicating on ESG issues.

We need to talk about....ESG issues

Companies unable to engage with stakeholders about progress being made in tackling the ESG issues critical to their industry's licence to operate, risk significant reputational damage.

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We've entered a time of ruthless transparency, with organisations and CEOs expected to take accountability for what happens in the world. To not actively engage with stakeholders on ESG issues carries as much risk as proactively engaging.

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NICOLE GORFER,
SENIOR GLOBAL
CORPORATE AFFAIRS
AND PEOPLE
LEADER, ROCHE.*

*Nicole is now at Adecco as its SVP Communications



UNDERSTANDING AND PRIORITISING ESG

JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND IT DOESN'T MEAN IT ISN'T SO

Fewer than half of the communications professionals we contacted as part of our research could identify what ESG issues might affect their organisations. This is surprising given the increasing importance of ESG issues to almost every stakeholder of any modern organisation, but particularly among consumers, employees, shareholders, investors, and legislators.

Just over half of all respondents reported that their business *had* actively tried to identify the ESG issues most crucial to their business during the past two years, by undertaking a materiality assessment.

A materiality assessment (formal or informal) should fast become a key part of a comms professional's toolkit. It is invaluable in helping keep track of an ever-growing, increasingly complex, and potentially contentious number of ESG issues. And, from an engagement perspective it is definitely a case of forewarned is forearmed.

In fairness to the organisations unaware of the ESG issues critical to their operations, many of these have only properly surfaced during the past five to ten years. A decade ago, neither the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) or the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) existed. The Corporate Value Chain (Scope 3) Accounting and Reporting Standard had only recently been created and only the most enlightened company boards would have considered their company's impact on biodiversity, or how their operations might be contributing to local water stress.

And few could have foreseen the degree to which investors would demand that a company provide detail on its decarbonisation plans, D&I and Net-Zero targets, and ESG competencies/ board representation and remuneration?

Likewise, awareness of gender rights within the workplace has until recently been seen as of little importance, so too the well-being of employees across the supply chain. The list goes on and evolves by the day.



When senior executives, and in particular the CEO, are active on social media, it puts a face to the brand – that, in turn shows authenticity and promotes trust in what the business is saying about important issues.

As with any area of the business, engagement on social media needs careful planning and execution – a carefully considered social media strategy will include objectives, expectations, a tactical plan, guidelines, processes, and best practices to follow.



ADAM POWELL,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

Question: A materiality assessment is something that can be used to identify and prioritise which ESG issues are the most critical to a business. It helps organisations understand how relevant specific ESG and sustainability topics are in terms of the potential impact on their organisation and importance to stakeholders. Has your business undertaken a materiality study or something similar in the past 2 years?



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A thorough review or materiality assessment of priority ESG issues is crucial, especially when many different groups of stakeholders are involved.

It's essential to identify what is important to stakeholders and the largest areas of potential impact to an organisation.

ESG areas to consider include (among others) corporate governance, diversity & inclusion, LGBTQIA+ issues, climate change resilience, energy and water management, and reporting transparency.

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MATTHEW WILLIS,
PARTNER, FORTOLD



It's concerning that ESG issues are bottom of the priority list for over 15% of businesses according to the communications professionals we surveyed. Just over a third (36%) reported them as the most important organisational priority, with slightly under half (49%) saying that ESG issues were given the number two spot.

Despite this, most businesses can see the writing on the wall when it comes to the importance of these issues to their respective organisations, with a large majority of respondents (79%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that there is increased scrutiny of ESG issues from external stakeholder groups.

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You often find organizations chasing the latest big ESG issues, but the smartest players anchor themselves in a purpose, and their ESG commitments follow, led from the top.

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ADAM POWELL,
PARTNER, FORTOLD

Question: Do you agree that there is increasing scrutiny of ESG issues from external stakeholders such as environmental groups?

50%

of respondents strongly agree that there is increasing stakeholder scrutiny of ESG issues

2.5%

disagree that there is increasing scrutiny of ESG issues by stakeholders

17.5%

neither agree nor disagree

29%

of respondents agree that there is increasing stakeholder scrutiny of ESG issues



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT THAT EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND WHAT ESG ISSUES MEAN FOR THEIR EMPLOYERS

It was encouraging to see a high level of understanding, among non-managerial employees, of the ESG issues critical to their employer's business. Around 80% of the comms professionals we asked were confident that their colleagues have a moderate to very good understanding.

BB

There is a huge battle at the moment for talent. Employees and potential employees want to see demonstrable action on ESG issues. At the same time, the pandemic has led many people to reflect on the impact of work on their personal lives and prioritise purpose and well-being.

The implication of this is that an employer's brand value is increasingly impacted by its action and engagement around environmental and societal issues, making it key to its social license to operate, and critical to attracting and retaining talent. Social media plays a fundamental role in engaging on this, and in helping employees connect to each other and their company's values.

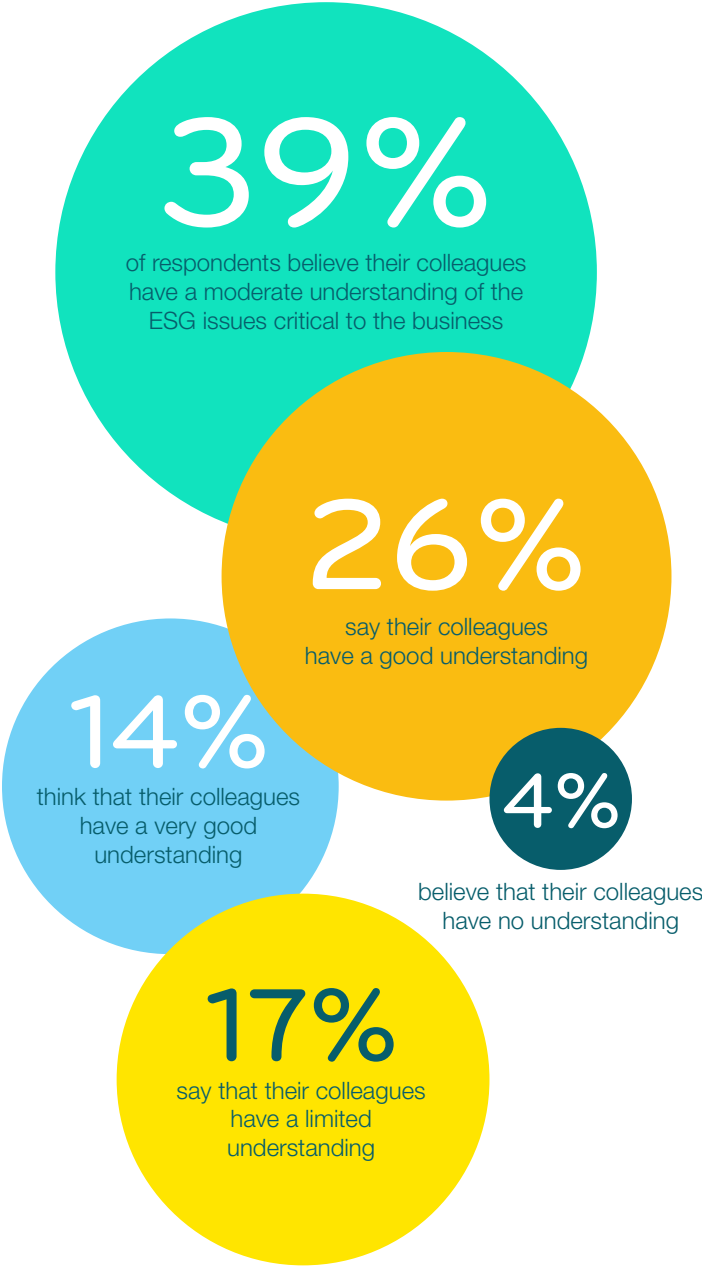
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NICKI ALLITT, VICE PRESIDENT GROUP COMMS, ISS

This might reflect the fact that, in recent years, ESG issues have moved from being an esoteric concern at board-level, to determining how many companies act day-to-day in their respective marketplaces. And, combined with an upward pressure to engage from civil society, how a company handles ESG is now a significant factor for potential and existing employees when deciding whether to join or stay at a company.

Question: Choose ONE description that best describes how well employees understand which ESG issues are critical to your business and stakeholders.



ESG STORIES CAN INSPIRE, MOTIVATE, AND HELP LEAD TO CHANGE – DO COMPANIES HAVE ONE TO TELL?

When asked about the clarity of their respective organisation's ESG story, respondents were divided. Over half of those who answered, were very confident that their ESG story was clear enough to share with internal colleagues and external stakeholder groups. However, the remaining 49% were at best only somewhat confident that this was the case. This is an issue – at any organisational growth or inflection point, its narrative or story needs to reflect the situation. And there is huge pressure from internal and external audiences to have a thoughtful and purpose-driven strategy that produces a clear ESG story – but for whatever reason, many companies are struggling with this.

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The pandemic has helped shift the balance of power towards employees and the ability to engage well with internal audiences is more important than ever.

It is our colleagues who often start discussions about ESG issues – sharing their pride, and sometimes their concerns. So, it's crucial to engage with them and to be open and ready to occasionally have difficult conversations. Social platforms are key to helping us do this and are particularly valuable when working remotely can mean that the only touchpoint with the brand is the logo at the top of a page.



NICOLE GORFER,
SENIOR GLOBAL
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*Nicole is now at Adecco as
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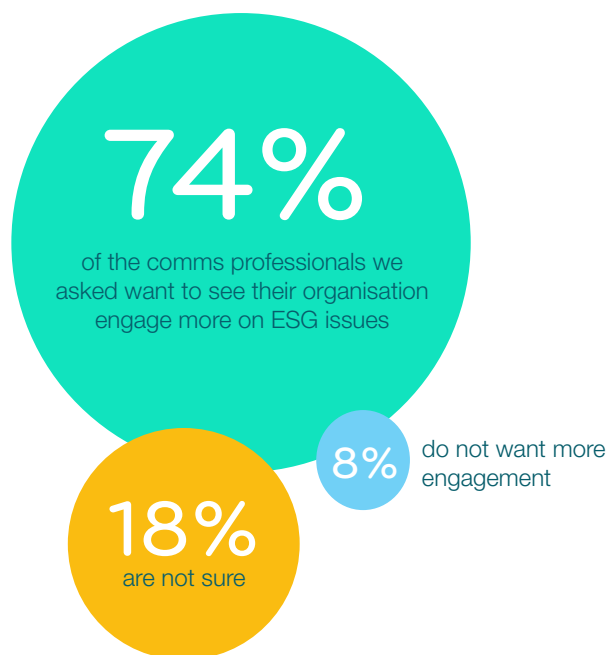
COMMS PROFESSIONALS WANT THEIR EMPLOYERS TO ENGAGE MORE ON ESG ISSUES

Nearly half (47%) of the comms professionals who took part in our research confirmed that their senior execs had increased their level of social media engagement on ESG issues.

For a cohort of professionals responsible for protecting and developing the reputation of their respective organisations, it is entirely unsurprising that a large majority (74%) want to see their organisations (and by implication, their senior execs) engage more on ESG issue.

But 14% are unsure and this is perhaps because of uncertainty about whether, they should be talking about ESG issues, and if so which ones. That's before considering other barriers to engaging on social media, such as lack of time, resources, and fear of the court of public opinion.

Question: Would you like to see your organisation engaging more on ESG issues?



IS THERE ENOUGH SUPPORT FOR THE EMPLOYEES WHO WANT TO ENGAGE ON ESG ISSUES?

The picture here is mixed. Although most companies encourage employee engagement on ESG issues, nearly a third of respondents said this isn't the case.

The view of 41% of respondents was that their organisation encourages employees to engage on ESG matters and provides regular suggested content to help with this.

Just over a quarter (28%) feel that there's encouragement at a corporate level but that their organisation doesn't provide content for employees to amplify across their own social channels.

While the view of nearly a third (31%) is that their organisation doesn't encourage employees to engage at all on ESG issues.

Question: Choose ONE statement that best describes your organisation's approach to employees using social media to engage on ESG matters.

41%

of respondents said that employees are encouraged to engage on ESG matters and regular suggested content is provided for them to use

28%

of respondents said that employees are encouraged to engage on ESG matters but that no content is provided

31%

said that their organisation does not encourage employees to engage on ESG matters

BB

For strategic communications to have the greatest impact, it's vital that internal and external communications are aligned. A worthwhile conversation with leaders is around the differences, purpose, and value of both external and internal communications and the use of a mix of channels, and benchmark and network analysis can play a valuable role in this.

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NICKI ALLITT, VICE PRESIDENT GROUP COMMS, ISS

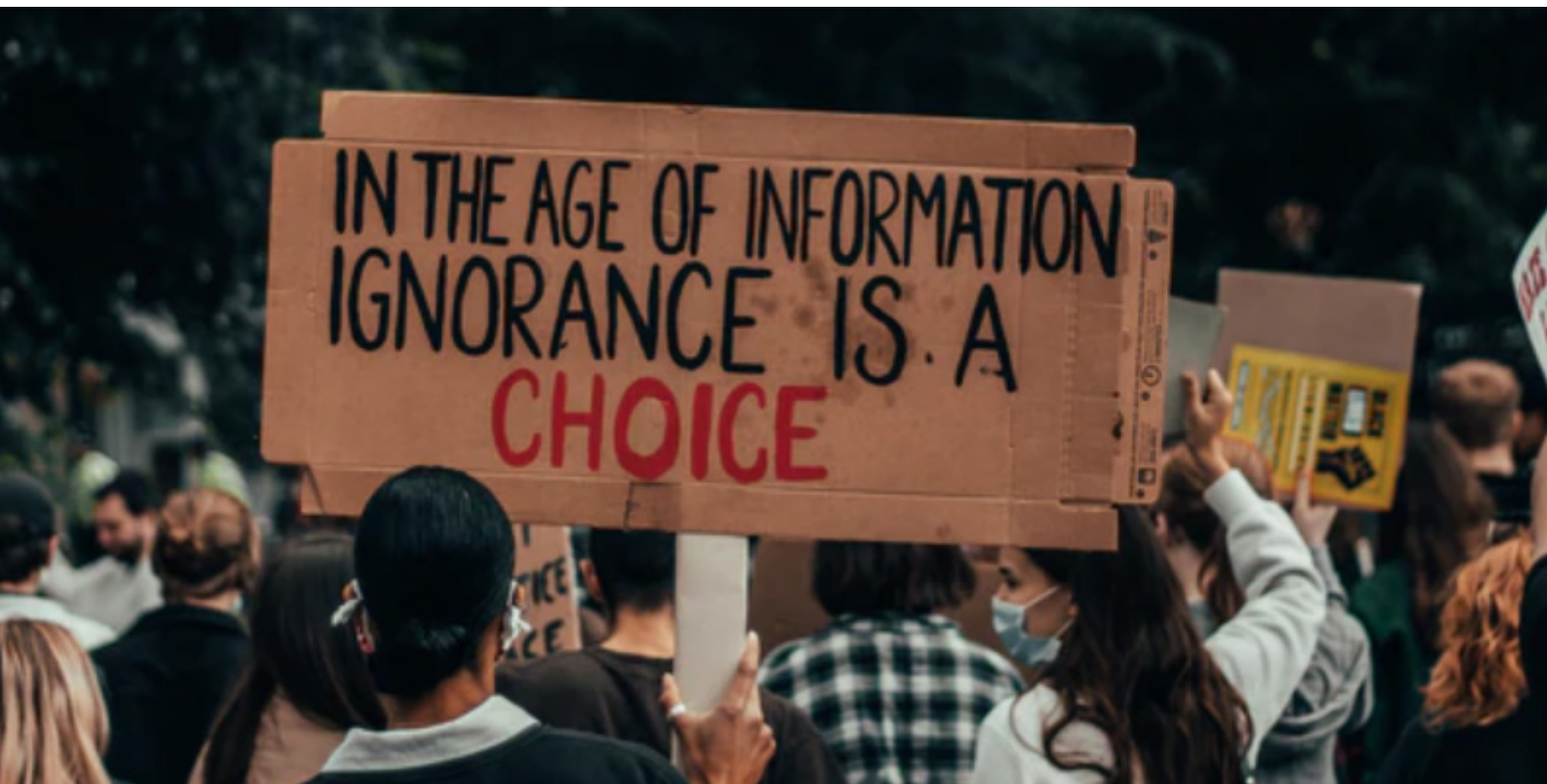
CONCLUSION

It's indisputably clear that ESG issues are becoming increasingly material to the success of a business. What's more, communications professionals – who are the focus of this research – are at the coal face and can have a fundamental role to play in determining how an organisation or company chooses to engage on them. Over half recognise the key ESG issues that affect their respective companies but there is a disconnect between this and the extent to which businesses are acting on it.

Most of the comms professionals we engaged with want their organisations to communicate about ESG more. Around half say that their colleagues don't feel that their employer's ESG story is clear enough, while over half believe there isn't sufficient organisational support for colleagues and staff who want to communicate about ESG.

Of more concern is the fact that senior executives are not as active on social media, with only half fully engaging across social platforms. The research also found that a substantial number handle their own social media accounts, while in 50% of all cases, there is no formal plan in place for these accounts. Taking that all into consideration, it's obvious that, among a large number of global companies, ESG communications is a) not getting the attention it deserves, b) not happening where audiences are active, and c) not coming from the senior leaders that stakeholders want to hear from.

As ESG issues continue to dominate the corporate landscape, this is something that urgently needs to change.



BUILDING YOUR CASE: PERSUADING YOUR SENIOR LEADERS TO ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS ON ESG ISSUES, USING SOCIAL MEDIA

How can comms professionals persuade senior leaders that its worth the time and investment required to engage with ESG issues on social media?

1. For any modern CEO there's now an expectation to engage, and you need to meet your stakeholders where they are – on social media. They are already actively engaging on ESG issues and want to hear about your corporate and personal perspectives.
2. This is not a personal vanity project – it's about building and leveraging your personal brand and position of authority, to tell your company's ESG story in the most authentic/persuasive way possible – internally and externally.
3. Even if you're not already doing it, your competitors' CEOs and senior execs will (or are planning to) lead from the front in engaging on social on ESG issues – and in doing so, enhancing peer-to-peer connections and opportunities for their business.
4. You have the chance to lead on issues and control the message, rather than being behind a story, reacting, and risking being wrong-footed.

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Comms professionals increasingly understand the importance and benefits to their business or organisation of engaging on ESG matters. It's critical to gain buy-in and commitment at the board level.

Presenting a well-thought-through evidence-based case for long-term engagement gives comms professionals the best chance of persuading key decision-makers within an organisation.

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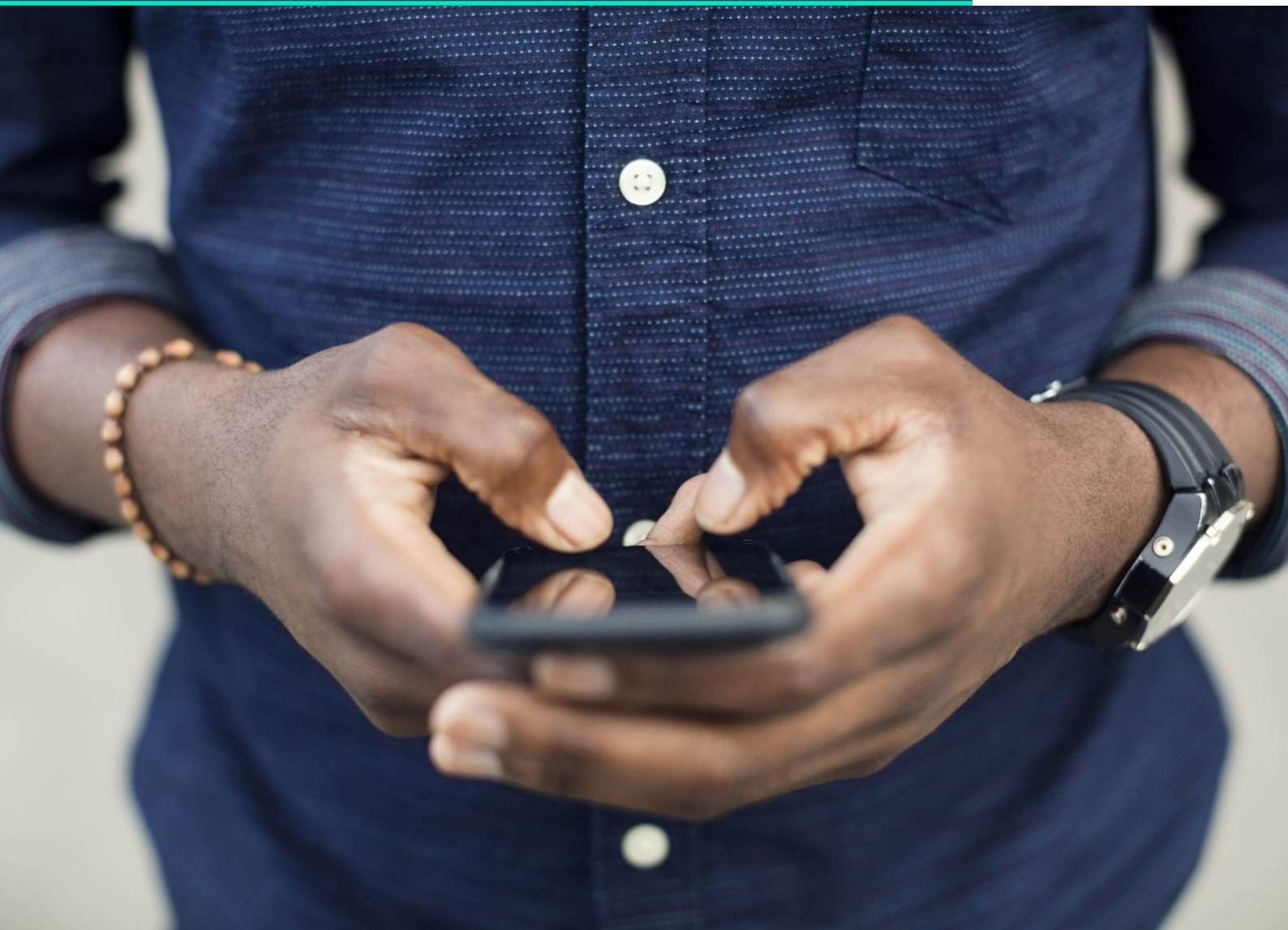
ADAM POWELL,
PARTNER, FORTOLD



TIPS FOR RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME AROUND ESG ISSUES

How can comms professionals run a successful engagement programme on ESG issues on social media?

- 1. Ask for commitment at board level** – in terms of time, energy, and resources. Engaging with stakeholders on social media carries with it opportunities and risks and deserves a place on the boardroom's agenda.
 - 2. Know what you're dealing with** – even if you don't have the resources to undertake a full materiality study, question your senior execs about the ESG issues they think could impact the business. This will not only help you to be better prepared from a comms perspective but will serve as a reminder to your colleagues of the importance of these issues.
 - 3. Focus on the fundamentals** – your authentic purpose and actions must inform and provide the framework for any ESG social programme. What you say matters but not as much as what you do.
 - 4. Find key diary moments to build the framework** of your social programme (days/events/policy updates etc). And monitor what key influencers are saying about these moments so that you can engage with them by liking/sharing/commenting on their content.
 - 5. Use evidence to persuade** – using proof points to support every claim you make/opinion you express.
 - 6. Content matters** – use appropriate, sensitive language and don't fall into the jargon trap. Powerful message-driven imagery will also help make your content more impactful.
 - 7. Drive the programme forward** – keep evaluating and coming back to your purpose. This will ensure that what you're saying doesn't put you at risk of being accused of greenwashing. And focus on qualitative metrics: ultimately, it's about who is in your network, not how many people engage.
 - 8. Align external with internal** – with social media blurring the lines of internal and external communications, organisations must have an aligned strategy to ensure that employees are engaged, always remembering that they are your most valuable advocates.
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