

[close window](#)

New Media Answers Old Questions for CEOs

by Paul Furiga, ABC

How do you scare a CEO? Whisper the words "new media" and wait for the trembling to begin. But new media can also help CEOs address old issues in their role as chief communicators for their organizations.

The volume of new media options contributes to CEO fear. From blogs to podcasts, vodcasts to wikis, the names of new media tools hopscotch across the alphabet like some new language. Let's look at just two new media tools to illustrate the opportunities that these channels present for CEOs.

Let's be direct

In today's fragmented media world, one of the most difficult CEO challenges is making a direct, measurable connection with key audiences. Podcasting offers CEOs a new answer to this age-old challenge.

Today, anyone with a computer, a microphone and an Internet connection can record a podcast, from a 90-second audio rant that mimics a radio commentary to an hours-long dissertation on health care, business or even the first 12 emperors of the Byzantine Empire.

Podcasts are easily found and downloaded from directory services such as [Podcast Alley](#), [Podcast Pickle](#) or [Yahoo! Podcasts](#).

Because podcasts are delivered via the Internet, they offer an unfiltered channel through which CEOs can reach specific audiences. Listeners must actively sign up to receive podcasts, allowing for accurate measurement of how many people are listening, and who is engaged.

Businesses are responding. Business-oriented podcasts, including those featuring or delivered by CEOs, are among the fastest-growing categories of podcasts. The Pew Internet Project, a nonprofit research center that examines the social impact of the Internet, reported in 2006 that the number of podcasts available in directories had grown from 1,000 in 2004 to more than 26,000 in 2006, with more than 1 million episodes available.

Dave Nelsen, CEO of audio innovator [Talkshoe](#), knows the new media challenges faced by CEOs. Nelsen notes that podcasts are built for our multitasking age: Listeners can tune in while they are commuting, jogging or working. At companies such as Nelsen's, podcasts are also becoming interactive. Using technology from his prior telephone experience, Nelsen built a service that delivers more than 300 unique "talkcasts" weekly. These are like radio call-in shows, giving listeners the ability to participate live by phone or computer chat with hosts and guests.

Seeing is believing

A second key challenge for many CEOs is communicating complex concepts to key audiences. The explosion of video on the Web, through sites such as YouTube, creates tremendous new opportunities to "see" the message. Previously, this would have been impossible because of gatekeepers in traditional media, or the bureaucratic challenges of employing traditional media to create a dialogue.

One particularly vibrant sector is health care. A search on [YouTube](#) returns

[Discuss this article](#)

Related Resources:

- [The See-Through CEO](#)
The rise of the Internet has drastically altered the communications of today's corporations. From CEO and employee blogs to videos on YouTube the new trend is transparency.
 - [Communication Strategies in the Age of Accountability](#)
The corporate environment is changing drastically—pressure to deliver results is intense, consumers are more difficult to reach and corporate transparency is now a requirement. CEOs must develop communication strategies that will help them navigate the new corporate environment.
 - [CEOs Get Abroad to Get Ahead](#)
A study reveals the increasing importance of international experience for aspiring CEOs.
-

hundreds of videos posted by health care organizations, from CEO videos explaining new technologies or treatments to talk show formats that appear journalistic in nature, while delivering company-specific content.

A crucial factor of online video is the inclusion of commentary and dialogue that engages key audiences. At YouTube, for example, recipients of CEO video messages respond with written comments and even video responses of their own; they can e-mail video links to friends or post links to Internet popularity sites such as [Digg](#), letting others know that they consider the videos worth viewing.

Too new for you?

Still, some CEOs will say, "this is not for me." They view their stakeholder set as too small or their industry as too traditional for new media communication. While this may be a pervasive view in some organizations, it's important to note that competitors, opponents and stakeholders may not share that view and are probably using new media.

Recently, the new social media site for PR professionals created by Ragan Communications, MyRagan.com, featured an entire discussion on videos highlighting poor CEO communication, posted by individuals or organizations that were unfriendly to the CEOs featured in the videos.

For this reason, even CEOs of "old" organizations need a strategy to deal with new media. Podcasts and video are new media channels in which journalists, citizen journalists and others are creating content that demands a response (if not a proactive strategy) from CEOs.

At a minimum, CEOs who pass on creating their own new media channels should look at response to new media just as they would a response to traditional media, such as radio or TV. If CEOs respond to a TV exposé, why wouldn't they address a damaging video that's posted online?

A key imperative in new media response is that unlike traditional media, when a critic attacks in cyberspace, the message travels like a sniper shot, to a very tightly defined audience, one that is often highly engaged, motivated and prepared to act.

The next new thing

So what happens next?

First, CEOs need to determine how to engage with new media. Not every CEO should jump into the blogosphere as an author. But given the low barriers of entry for new media participation, anyone can hop on the Internet and communicate about any CEO or organization. So CEOs may rightly decide that a blog is not right for them, but woe to those who say they don't need a new media strategy at all.

Ultimately, how a CEO uses new media comes down to the story the CEO wants to tell. And that's a truth that transcends the technologies and channels represented by any flavor of "new media."

Author Ursula K. LeGuin once wrote, "There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories." The same is true for CEOs in leading their organizations—without a good idea of the story they have to share, the decision on how to approach new media is meaningless.

Paul Furiga is president of WordWrite Communications LLC, a public relations agency based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that helps companies create, develop and share their great, untold stories with everyone who needs to hear them. A former vice president of Ketchum Public Relations, Paul also spent two decades in journalism. He can be reached at paul.furiga@wordwritepr.com.

© 2007 International Association of Business Communicators.
One Hallidie Plaza, Suite 600 San Francisco, CA 94102 USA
+1 415.544.4700

[Terms of Service](#)