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# HOW TO COMMUNICATE NOW

ORCHARD'S  
GUIDE TO  
FINANCIAL  
SERVICES  
PR IN 2021

# FOREWORD

The language of our lives has changed. We're all now familiar with pandemics and immunology, social distancing and lockdowns. Phrases that were previously dismissed as corporate jargon have become vessels for hope that things will get better: blueprints and roadmaps and exit frameworks are pored over and greeted with fervour.

Methods of communication have also changed. The pandemic, and the lockdowns, have accelerated the drive towards digital living. According to a McKinsey Global Survey of executives, their companies have accelerated the digitisation of their customer and supply-chain interactions and of their internal operations by three to four years. That will include adoption of social media and engagement with digital media. The numbers are striking; LinkedIn reports 443 billion feed updates across its platform in February 2021 alone.

## **Digital keeps the Channel Islands connected**

In the Channel Islands, digital media has helped us to be part of global conversations in a visible way. In a year when the usual travel commitments and BD engagements were significantly reduced, digital has played a huge part in keeping us connected.

Guernsey Finance, in its annual update, reported that its social media following grew by a fifth in 2020, and Jersey Finance, at its equivalent event, featured a panel in which digital was named a vital component of enhancing the island's reputation on the global stage.

This publication curates findings from multiple webinars and industry events from the first months of 2021 and combines them with Orchard's public relations expertise to provide a clear guide to financial services PR in 2021.

'FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMUNICATIONS, THE TIME IS RIGHT TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY AND REVOLUTIONISE APPROACH AND RESULTS.'



## Orchard's expertise

At Orchard we know what we're talking about, and we know how to help you talk about the issues that will engage your stakeholders. In 2020 we worked on strategic communications for:

- **23** financial services clients spanning: private banking, insurance, funds – include PE and RE, private wealth, pensions, compliance and regulatory
- **5** of Eprivateclient's top trust companies
- **2** of Eprivateclient's top offshore law firms

This guide sets out the new financial and social landscape on pages 4-6, before looking at three key themes for financial services PR in 2021 across pages 8-13. If you want to skip ahead and find out the six things you need to be doing right now, head to page 14.

In a world where everything has changed, it's not enough to communicate the same things in the same old ways. The time is now to seize the opportunity to revolutionise your organisation, do things differently and stand out from the crowd. Read on to find out how your communications activity can be the key to unlocking your growth in 2021 and beyond.



DAN GALLIENNE - HEAD OF PR , ORCHARD



# CONFRONT LANDS

It's an especially interesting time to be communicating. "You would say that", I hear you cry, but even a cursory look at the news from week to week demonstrates that global events of significant magnitude seem to be unfolding more regularly than ever. And they're all presented against a backdrop of a recovery from a virus that has changed everything.

The COVID-19 recovery is going to be a thread that runs through corporate objectives, performance and strategies throughout this year, and probably beyond, and it will likewise impact communications activity.

As the world looks to 'build back better' the financial services industry faces a massive opportunity to be part of this global current. That means a frank re-examination of purpose (a huge focus for comms activity pre-COVID), assessing what stakeholders want and need to know, and a chance to step up and lead in thoughts, words and actions.

## **The global economy**

The economic context of communicating now shifts regularly – indicative of the short-term timeframes and adaptability that have been so vital to survival over the past year – but some factors will certainly





# TING A NEW SCAPE

impact comms activity in the UK and Crown Dependencies. Some of the positives to look out for, according to EY's ITEM Club, are:

- High vaccination levels should aid the economic recovery and build confidence
- Households have, for the most part, saved money during the lockdown(s) so will have disposable income when freedoms are restored – that should see a rise in consumer spending. £30bn extra in liquid cash was being banked in the summer months of 2020, compared to pre-COVID levels
- The Brexit deal, while not as comprehensive as many had hoped for, is better than no deal at all and has removed an element of uncertainty from markets
- The rate that the pandemic spread around the world means that we're likely to see simultaneous economic recoveries, compared to the staggered recoveries we normally see from recessions. Everyone recovering together should contribute to a bumper year of global growth

Economic imperatives aren't the only reason to seize the communications initiative, however. The renewed focus on communities and human connectivity presents a huge chance to establish an authentic voice, which is always the most effective means of communication.

### **Authenticity and trust are vital to reputation**

The pandemic has affected behaviours and we know that, from 2019 to 2020, there were increases in the UK in digital consumption (streaming videos and podcasts). Unsurprising, with access to print media being somewhat restricted, but nonetheless indicative of a trend that was around before the pandemic struck.

Digital communications allow you to enhance your authenticity and build trust: by having real people from your organisation appear on video and podcast content you put faces to your brand; and by increasing visibility and honesty you take advantage of a trust vacuum in society. Edelman's annual Trust Barometer shows that, in 2021, business is more trusted than NGOs, government and media.

*".... high expectations of business to address and solve today's challenges has never been more apparent. The heightened expectations of business bring CEOs new demands to focus on societal engagement with the same rigor, thoughtfulness, and energy used to deliver on profits."*

Edelman Trust Barometer 2021

The last year, with all its challenges, has confirmed that we're all human and that brands should be communicating with empathy to tell human stories. That's not an easy pivot or strategy to adopt, but it is a worthwhile one.





A bonsai tree with green foliage and exposed roots against a black background. The tree is positioned centrally, with its roots hanging down and its foliage at the top. The text is overlaid on the tree's trunk.

# **THEME 1.**

# **EMBRACE ESG**



2021 being the year of COP26 has provided another boost to the trajectory of a theme that was already in the ascendancy: ESG.

It's highly likely that your business is already discussing how it measures its environmental, social and governance factors, and how it's going to have to report on them. If you're not already having these discussions at board level, you need to be. This presents an opportunity for communications professionals to support organisations and, in some cases lead ESG.

Vuelio surveyed 187 public relations practitioners across a range of ESG issues in April 2021 to benchmark the sector's understanding of and readiness for ESG. One outcome of the exercise was that ESG is led by the CEO or another C-level function in 60% of organisations but, for 19% of organisations, the Head of Communications/PR is responsible for leading ESG.

For many in the financial services space, the time has come to move beyond discussing ESG and sustainability and to start acting on it. If you're doing something meaningful, whether in-house or on behalf of clients, it's time to start telling your stakeholders about it. We've reached a point where amplification of your sustainability credentials is going to win you business.

A recent PRCA panel including speakers from Zurich Insurance and State Street Global Advisers discussed the rise in ESG and the imperative to show that financial services companies are making progress in the space. For providers, there's not only work to be done to debunk the myth that ESG and returns are mutually exclusive, but also to educate people

on the changing investment landscape. The evidence is out there. The Financial Times reported that the two best-performing US equity funds of 2020, both run by Invesco, both focus on clean energy. With returns of more than 200 per cent each, these funds are delivering for investors and proving that sustainability is here to stay.

## **The green revolution is underway**

Away from financial products, 'good' companies are also standing out – whether as equity investments or from a reputational perspective. Patagonia, a renowned B Corporation and a paragon of sustainable business practices, has sales approaching \$1bn and is attracting some of the best and brightest minds in manufacturing, supply chain management and retail.

Companies that truly embrace ESG values are going to perform better, and financial services providers who can demonstrate their own credentials are also going to thrive in customer and staff acquisition and retention, profitability and reputation.

If you're already making moves in the ESG space, now is the time to be shouting about it – we can help you to take a lead, own the subject matter and establish your green credentials. If you haven't quite figured out your position, our messaging sessions could help in discovering what you're already doing and giving you the language to communicate it to your stakeholders.

The green revolution is underway, now is the time to take to the field.

Orchard's exclusive partnership with ESI Monitor shows that we practise what we preach: we're undertaking ESI's Environmental Business Operations Framework to better understand and minimise our impact on the environment.

Our work with ESI will help organisations navigate sustainability by developing CSR and ESG narratives, devising communication strategies, content generation and internal communication programmes. If you are implementing ESI Monitor's framework, get in touch: [sustainability@orchardpr.com](mailto:sustainability@orchardpr.com)





# THEME 2. BE CONFIDENT





Tony Langham, chief executive of Lansons, recently outlined three revolutions he wants to see in financial communications. The most important of these he labels 'reputation management'.

Langham argues that it's time to shift mindsets in financial communications and to move away from the traditional, conservative approach of risk mitigation. A focus on minimising risk is understandable, but it's also homogenous and bland. Instead, it's time to be bold and embrace reputation management. This is a more expansive strategy that acknowledges that sometimes being bold and creative are absolutely essential to building a stellar reputation in financial services.

Langham is making this point at an apposite time and, to take his argument a step further, we'd say that now is the time to recognise that huge rewards are on offer, if a sensible strategy is devised to go out and get them.

## Window of opportunity

What are the factors contributing to this window of opportunity? We've broken them down into four key considerations:

### A MORE SETTLED ECONOMY FROM THE SECOND HALF OF 2021

If the pandemic recovery continues to go to plan then financial markets should settle down into the second half of 2021 and beyond. More settled conditions should create the right environment to unlock some liquid capital flow into markets and the economy. Whether its pent-up consumer spending or private equity dry powder, a large cash injection could be on the way.

### THE IMPACT OF BREXIT ON THE CROWN DEPENDENCIES

For us in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, an opportunity comes in the form of the UK's exit from the EU, and the time it's going to take for the UK to establish its trade and political relationships. The Crown Dependencies offer consistency and stability and now is the time to be shouting that message from the rooftops. The islands facilitate huge global capital flows already, leveraging that expertise and acting as a secure partner for business is a market differentiator.

### THE CHANCE TO 'RESET'

The pandemic has changed the ways we relate to each other and, crucially, to organisations. Those who have communicated well throughout the pandemic have told their COVID-19 story. Healthcare companies have done this especially well, using authentic human stories and messaging to communicate their brand's values and encourage empathy and connectedness. Consumers now expect a level of humanity in communications, so this is the time to re-examine those corporate communication strategies and the language and tone of voice your organisation is using.

### AUDIENCES LOOKING FOR LEADERS

A related point to the previous one, chief executives and other C-suite employees are now expected to be front-and-centre in communications. A Signal AI webinar – One Year On: Covid-19, Communications and Financial Services – asked a panel what the role of the chief exec is now, the answer was unanimous: they should convey what the leadership of the business thinks about key issues, have a point of view, and own the issues that drive the news agenda (including the controversial ones). One panellist said that "humanising the brand is a vital function of the chief exec now."



# THEME 3. STAR

The financial services industry has arguably never had an issue with the volume of content it produces; thought leadership, blogs and comment pieces abound. But is your content good?

That question is more important now than ever before. If the COVID-19 pandemic has proved that everyone can work online and communication no longer has to be face-to-face, then you need to think about what you're saying and whether it's going to cut through the noise.

This has always been the remit of the PR professional – it's our job to understand the landscape and produce compelling content, whether that's via editorial, commentary opportunities, videos, podcasts or any of the other means that exist in 2021.

## **Providing value to audiences**

One way to elevate content is to ensure it is educational; think about what you can teach your reader/viewer/listener and what you want them to come away with. Give them a reason to come back to you and trust you as a source.



# RT EDUCATING

Education is a multi-faceted objective, so there are many areas in which you can educate your audiences and stakeholders, and keep them coming back for more:

## EDUCATE THEM ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

Educate them about your business: one of the currents that has flowed through financial services strategy and comms over the past few years is 'purpose'. What do you stand for? What are your values? Why do you exist? If you don't know the answers to any of these questions you stand to lose out - in talent acquisition, in customer appeal and in long-term viability.

## EDUCATE THEM ABOUT YOUR SUBJECT MATTER

Educate them about your subject matter: the traditional form of content shares an authentic opinion or insight, and this is so important now. Customers are more empowered than ever before. COVID-19 has seen people take an active interest in their finances; what sort of institutional pension scheme are they invested in? Are their investments getting good returns? When can they retire? Use content to "serve not sell"; give people information that is useful and insightful and they'll value it more highly than content that simply states facts.

## MASS EDUCATION ABOUT FINANCIAL SERVICES

Mass education about financial services: the panel that opened the PRCA's 'The Future of Financial Communications' online conference noted that there is an imperative to talk to 'the person in the street'. Financial services organisations should be educating everyone on why their industry matters, why it's good to make money, how returns are generated and how investments work. The obvious benefit of communicating these basics is that you can reach a wider audience. A secondary benefit is that you start to appear accessible to all and start to increase understanding of what you actually do. In the Crown Dependencies this need is especially acute; your sector is a massive part of your island's economy, but are you telling everyone about the contribution you're making?

Educating audiences builds trust in your brand; if people understand your values, why you are an expert, and the difference you're making to their daily lives then they will value you more, respect your brand and burnish your reputation.

With a more engaged, and much wider, audience than ever before, as well as more ways to reach them, now is the time to set out a clear communications strategy and begin to educate.

# WHAT TO DO NOW

The global currents of the past few years, combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have presented financial services companies with a golden opportunity to start communicating in new ways about new things. Here are the things you should be doing now to seize the opportunity:

1. Think about your organisation's purpose
2. Outline your approach to ESG, and decide what you can say publicly
3. Be bold in your messaging and your proposition
4. Consider who in your leadership team can drive and own the news agenda
5. Work out how you can educate your audiences
6. Get in touch with Orchard





## REFERENCES

Any referenced insights in this guide were gained from attending the following events between January and April 2021:

EY ITEM Club UK Winter Forecast: Outlook for the Channel Islands, 28 January 2021

PRCA - City and Financial Conference – The Future of Financial Communications, 2 March 2021

We Are Guernsey - Global Guernsey: Continuing Market Access In An Uncertain World Webinar, 9 March 2021

Signal AI - One Year On: Covid-19, Communications and Financial Services, 25 March 2021

Guernsey Finance – Guernsey Finance Industry Update 2021, 21 January 2021

Jersey Finance – Jersey Finance: Annual Review 2020, online, 21 January 2021

And from the following sources:

McKinsey, McKinsey Global Survey of executives, 5 October 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>

Edelman Trust Barometer 2021, 16 March 2021, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>

'Green energy funds top league table in banner year for ESG', Financial Times, 26 December 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/cad->



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