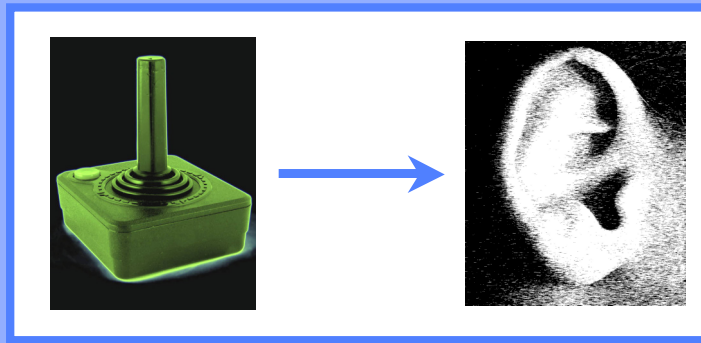




Please note that this archival material was published under Enspektos' former corporate identity.

For more insight and information on a range of health marketing communications-related topics, please visit our educational initiative, the Path of the Blue Eye Project at www.pathoftheblueeye.com.



From Command & Control To Engage & Encourage

A new healthcare communications
strategy for a social media world



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E-book Author: Fard Johnmar, Founder, Envision Solutions, LLC

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, companies like Dell, Microsoft, Macromedia and General Motors have used “social media” technologies to engage and communicate with their stakeholders and the public.¹ These corporations understand that the Internet has given the masses the power to significantly influence their economic fortunes.

Social media has also affected the healthcare industry. For example, pharmaceutical companies, non-profits and individuals are using it for range of activities such as market research and knowledge exchange.

However, many in healthcare have been hesitant to do more than dip their toes into the social media ocean. This is partly because they have developed communications strategies that give them tight control over how information is developed and distributed. Social media advocates say: “Give up control.” People in healthcare respond: “No. I have good legal, ethical and business reasons to maintain ownership over information I produce. I can’t let the public ‘highjack’ my content and messages.”

Like it or not, the masses are already influencing perceptions of the healthcare industry and the products, services and ideas it produces. Someday soon, organizations and individuals in healthcare without a plan for engaging social media may find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. **The time to start developing a social media communications strategy is now.** This e-book will help you create an effective one.

**“This e-book will help you communicate effectively
about healthcare in a social media world.”**

¹ The term social media refers to a group of technologies that enable people to collaborate, interact or meet via the Internet.

THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

By this point, you have probably heard about at least one of the following social media technologies:²

- **Discussion Boards:** Online communities where people exchange information and ideas on a range of topics (discussion boards are also commonly referred to as bulletin boards and online forums)
- **Blogs (Weblogs):** Frequently updated Websites where text or video content is displayed in reverse chronological order
- **Podcasts:** A method of distributing multimedia (video or audio) content over the Internet for playback on computers or portable media devices
- **Wikis:** Software or Websites that enable people to edit material quickly and easily
- **Video Sharing Websites:** Online communities like YouTube (www.youtube.com) where individuals and organizations can post videos and other multimedia content for review and discussion

The technology, food services and media industries have already witnessed how social media is giving motivated consumers the power to shape how people interpret and consume information. As the Internet plays a greater role in healthcare, the influence of social media on the industry will increase.

“Social media gives the masses as much influence on the interpretation and consumption of information as large organizations.”

² There are many other social media technologies such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and link sharing Websites. This e-book does not focus on these tools, partly because they are not as popular or have not been used extensively in communications campaigns. To learn more about other forms of social media, please see the “resources” section of this publication.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE HEALTHCARE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

Over the past few years, the Internet has become an important tool for people seeking healthcare information. According to a 2006 survey conducted by Harris Interactive, 136 million Americans have searched online for health content.

As more people use the Internet to find health information, they are being exposed to a variety of messages. This is because online search engines regularly highlight healthcare content featured on blogs, discussion boards, wikis and other forms of social media.

All of this online activity is beginning to influence how people view information produced by the healthcare industry. Most importantly:

- According to the 2006 Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual survey measuring the public's confidence in corporations, government, media and other major institutions, **people tend to trust their peers more than authority figures**. This study implies that people may be willing to accept information they find published in social media – even if it is inaccurate.
- Increasingly, people are going online to find information about healthcare products, services and issues they learn about via the mass media. Once they conduct an Internet search, they are being exposed to hundreds of diverse voices that are reinterpreting and retransmitting industry-developed messages. Over time, the Web may make it more difficult to measure how audiences are responding to communications campaigns developed by individuals and organizations in healthcare.

“Healthcare content developed by people producing social media is viewed as credible and reliable.”

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS

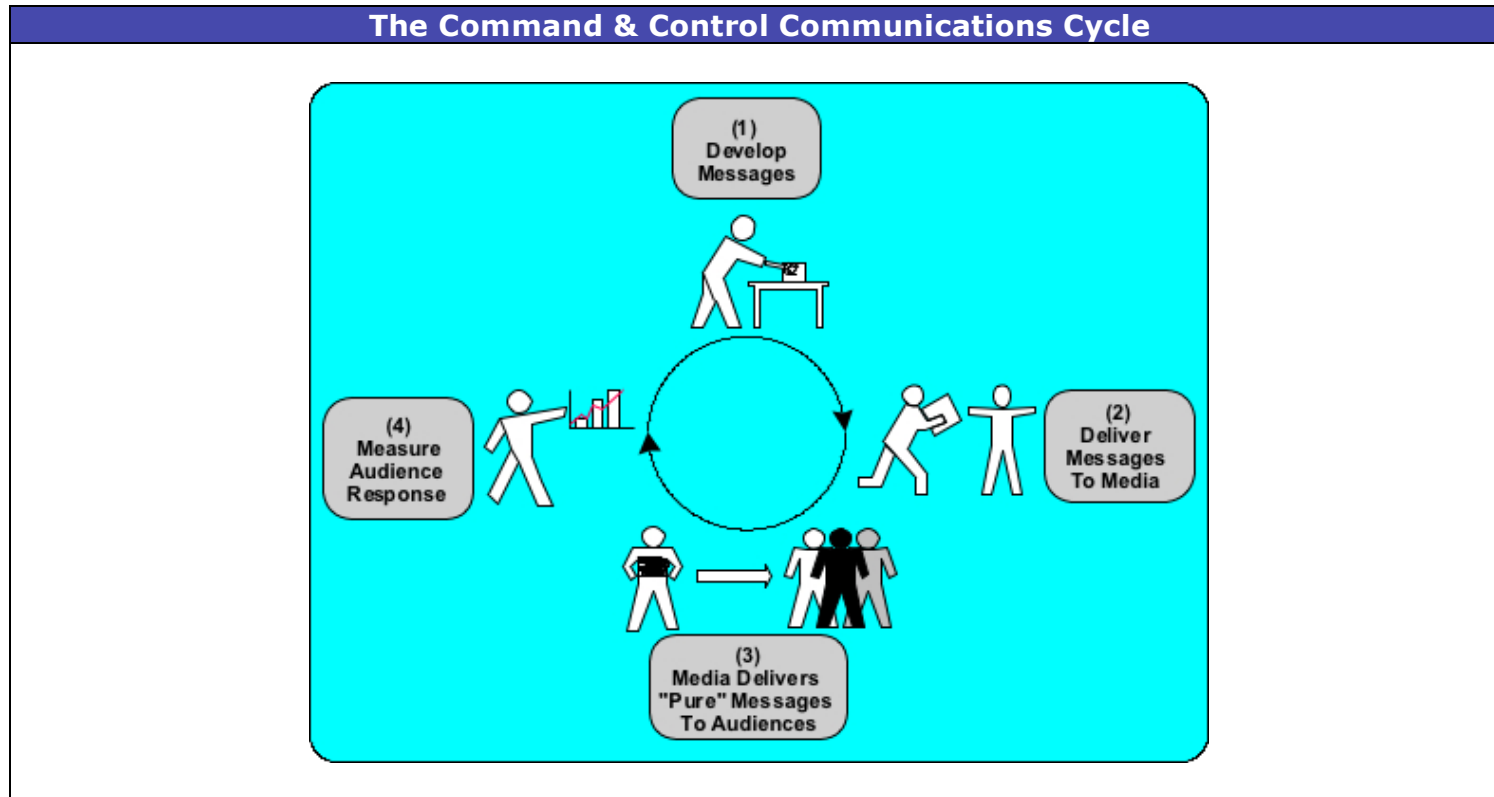
As the number of online information sources increases, the healthcare industry will have to reevaluate how it conducts communications campaigns. Traditionally, people in healthcare have attempted to carefully control the presentation and distribution of content. This “command and control” strategy has two primary phases:

- **Phase I: Command**
In the “command” phase, the development of content is carefully managed. Subject matter and communications experts are called upon to help convey complex healthcare information to key stakeholders and the public.
- **Phase II: Control**
In the “control” phase, industry players attempt to manage how people receive healthcare information so that what people hear = what was communicated. Conducting mass media communications campaigns (advertising, public relations and other marketing efforts) has traditionally been the best way to achieve this objective.

Despite its name, the command and control strategy should not be viewed negatively. **Individuals and organizations in healthcare have many good ethical, legal and business reasons to “own” the production and distribution of their content.** For example, some corporations, especially pharmaceutical and biotech firms, are heavily regulated and are expected to provide accurate information to the public.

“The ‘command and control’ strategy helps organizations and individuals in healthcare fulfill their legal, ethical and business obligations.”

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS



The graphic above illustrates how the healthcare industry has traditionally implemented command and control communications. The four primary stages of this strategy are outlined below.

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS

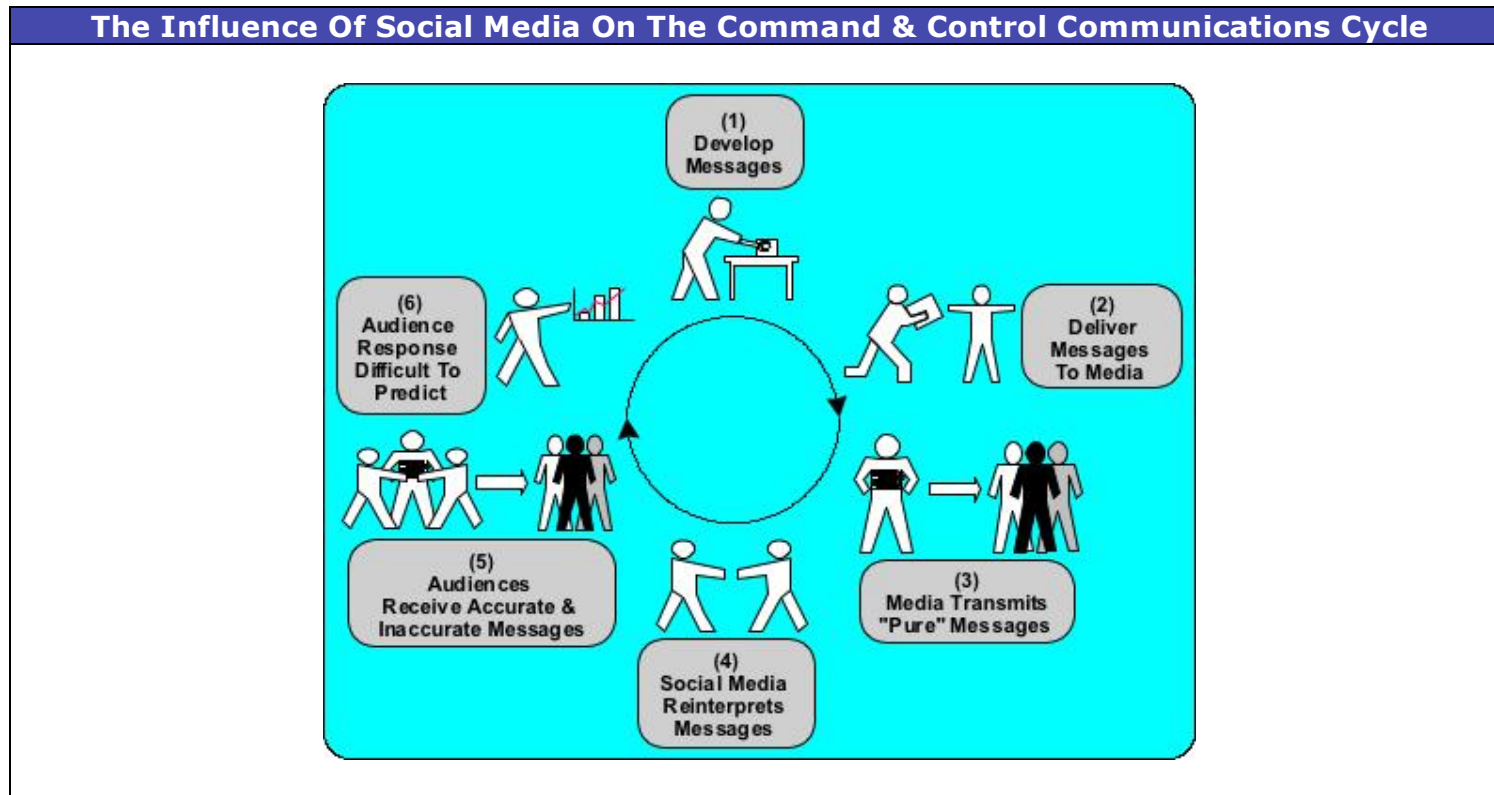
- **Stage I – Develop Messages:** In this stage, the information or “messages” that are most important to communicate are determined. (Before message development, the communications approach [generally advertising or public relations] that will deliver messages most effectively is selected.)
- **Stage II – Deliver Messages To Media:** Traditionally, the healthcare industry has relied on newspapers, magazines, television and radio to disseminate its content. As its popularity has grown, the Internet has become another important communications channel.
- **Stage III – Media Delivers Messages To Audiences:** The media transmits industry messages to key stakeholders and the public. Online/offline advertising provides the greatest level of content control while messages communicated by journalists are subject to reinterpretation. Despite this, public relations is critical because news items are viewed as more credible than advertising.
- **Stage IV – Communications Campaign Measurement:** The response to a communications campaign is measured (i.e., visits to a Website, prescriptions, sales leads, etc.).

The **primary benefit** of the command and control communications strategy is that it **increases the odds that what is communicated = what people hear.**

“The command and control strategy involves the careful development of healthcare messages that are transmitted by the media in a more or less ‘pure’ form.”

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS IN A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

As discussed above, the advent of social media is changing how the healthcare industry's audiences receive and interpret its messages. Over time, it may become more difficult to implement and measure command and control communications campaigns (see graphic below).



COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS IN A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

The rise of social media may reduce the effectiveness of command and control communications because:

- **Social Media Is Reinterpreting Messages:** Currently, the “traditional” media is still communicating the healthcare industry’s messages. However, people are encountering social media online, which is reinterpreting and retransmitting industry-produced content in numerous ways.
- **People Are Receiving A Mix Of Accurate & Inaccurate Messages:** Many creators of social media are doing an excellent job of retransmitting healthcare industry content accurately. However, there is also a lot of inaccurate information on the Internet. This means that audiences are receiving a mixed set of messages. Over time, this may make it more difficult to measure and predict audience response to communications campaigns.

The eroding effectiveness of command and control communications means that healthcare industry players **will have no choice but to engage and develop social media if they are interested in helping people access accurate and helpful information.**

Physicians and other healthcare providers who have started blogs already recognize this. One of their reasons for maintaining Weblogs is to educate others and help those searching online for information become better informed “consumers” of healthcare.

“The healthcare industry will have no choice but to engage and develop social media if it is interested in helping people find accurate and helpful information online.”

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS IN A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

There is another important reason for the healthcare industry to change its communications strategy. **Social media has the potential to shift control of healthcare brands to the masses.** The following fictional case study illustrates one way this could happen.

A major hospital has spent the past two years devoting significant human and financial resources developing a marketing campaign that highlights its patient-friendly service and technologically advanced medical facilities. One day an anonymous person provides an influential healthcare blogger with information indicating that the hospital uses second-hand equipment and routinely overcharges patients without health insurance.

In response, the blogger contacts the hospital for clarification about the tip. However, because its management does not recognize the influence of social media it refuses to engage her. She decides to post an article about the tip and notes that the hospital declined her request for clarification. A journalist who writes for a major national newspaper reads her blog. The reporter writes about the blogger's post. His story is quickly cited by other traditional and social media.

Although the hospital defends its policies and services, the damage is done. Many people searching online for information about the hospital read the blogger's original post. They conclude that the hospital is dishonest and decide to seek its competitor's services. It takes years for the hospital to fully repair its tarnished brand.

Although this fictional example may appear farfetched to some, individuals and organizations in other industries have suffered great harm to their reputation and brands because they have failed to engage social media.

**“Social media may shift control of healthcare brands to the masses.
Healthcare industry players that ignore it are placing themselves at risk.”**

COMMAND AND CONTROL COMMUNICATIONS IN A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

The impact of the Internet on the exchange of healthcare content may force the industry to reexamine its most basic assumptions about communications. Over time it will recognize that:

- **100% message control is impossible:** People get healthcare information from a variety of online sources. This will make developing a strategy for engaging and producing social media very important.
- **Trust is shifting:** People increasingly rely on their peers for healthcare information because they are perceived as less biased. However, if done correctly industry players can develop social media that will give them "a seat at the table" and increase their credibility.
- **The focus should be on improving the quality of healthcare information on the Internet:** The most important way that the healthcare industry can help the public is to provide accurate information.
- **The rise of social media will not force the industry to stop "selling":** The public recognizes that people in the healthcare industry have their own agendas. Engaging social media does not mean that they have to stop advocating for issues or selling their products, services and issues.

"Complete message control is impossible, trust is shifting to the masses and there is no guarantee that people will believe what is communicated. However, engaging social media can earn industry players a 'seat at the table' and greater credibility."

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

In a world where social media is very influential, complete message control will be impossible. However, people in healthcare will still be responsible for ensuring that their messages are communicated accurately. To help, Envision Solutions has developed a new strategy called “engage and encourage.” Like command and control communications, it has two primary phases:

- **Phase I: Engage**

The “engage” phase involves working aggressively with influential developers of social media so they can help spread the word about healthcare products, services and issues. Engagement means:

- **Conducting** research to identify influential social media
- **Using** monitoring tools like Technorati (www.technorati.com), Board Tracker (www.boardtracker.com), Sphere (www.sphere.com) and Google to track healthcare conversations on social media.³

- **Phase II: Encourage**

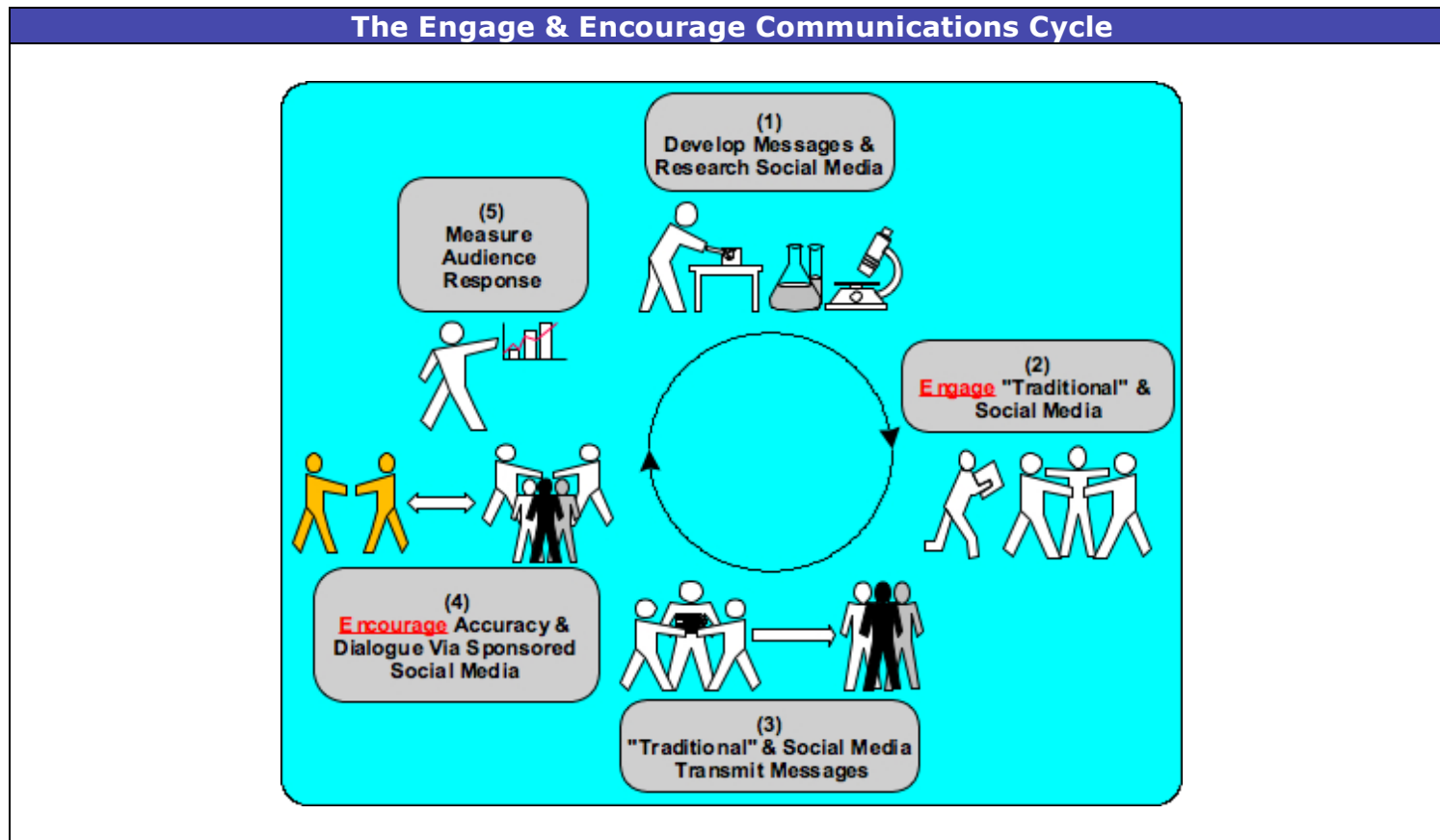
The “encourage” phase involves:

- **Collaborating** with social media to encourage them to accurately transmit healthcare messages
- **Producing** social media that will help enrich and expand online healthcare dialogue

“The ‘engage and encourage’ strategy will help you ensure information is communicated accurately online and improve relations with your audiences.”

³ Technorati and Sphere are blog search engines. Board Tracker is a tool for searching discussion boards.

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD



The graphic above illustrates how to conduct engage and encourage communications. The five stages of this strategy are outlined below.

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

PHASE I: ENGAGE

- **Stage I – Research Social Media & Develop Messages:** This involves:
 - **Planning your communications approach** (decide who you will target and how will you reach them)
 - **Using online tracking tools** to identify influential developers of social media and creating a strategy for interacting with them
 - **Developing messages** that will resonate with traditional and social media (this means understanding what content to develop and who to target with your messages)

Tips For Success: Unlike podcasts and blogs, wikis and discussion boards are produced by many different people. This means that it will be difficult to deliver messages directly to those primarily responsible for developing these types of social media. In addition, attempting to “plant” healthcare information on an online forum or wiki is inadvisable.

Researching podcasters and bloggers and approaching them appropriately is the best way to increase the odds that your messages will be transmitted via social media. If strategically appropriate and you have the necessary human and financial resources, consider developing a wiki or a bulletin board to broaden online conversation about issues important to you (see below for more).

“Research is critical. Find out who is developing social media focusing on topics important to you and your audiences.”

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

- **Stage II – Engage Traditional & Social Media:** This involves:
 - Delivering information via:
 - **Advertising:** Some blogs, podcasts, wikis and bulletin boards have large audiences and are willing to accept banner ads, text links and other forms of advertising.
 - **Public/Social Media Relations:** Delivering messages to journalists and creators of social media and encouraging them to develop stories.
 - **Posting Multimedia On A Video Sharing Website:** Consider developing and posting multimedia content on a video sharing Website like YouTube (www.youtube.com). Content on these sites is viewed and shared by millions of people each day. These sites are an excellent means of delivering targeted, controlled messages to key audiences and encouraging dialogue and debate.

Tips For Success: The key to successful public/social media relations is knowledge. Understand what the journalist, podcaster or blogger is interested in writing about. Bloggers have often highlighted examples of people who have “pitched” stories to them inappropriately. A little knowledge will increase your odds of securing positive coverage and avoiding embarrassing publicity.

“Reach out proactively to people creating social media to help them understand issues important to you. Doing so will strengthen your relationships with key influencers and help you reach your audiences.”

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

- **Stage III – Social & Traditional Media Deliver Messages:** A successful communications campaign will result in a wide variety of online and offline media coverage. However, it will be important to monitor any stories published on blogs and podcasts to ensure that your messages are communicated accurately.

PHASE II: ENCOURAGE

- **Stage IV – Encourage Accuracy & Dialogue:** Monitor the coverage you receive in traditional and social media. For example, where appropriate, leave commentary on a blog to correct or clarify a story.

The best way to shape conversation and encourage accuracy is to produce your own social media. Developing a blog or podcast series is one means of raising awareness. Posting videos on a Website like YouTube can help you reach new audiences and take advantage of the “viral” aspects of the Web as people recommend and distribute content you create.

Starting a discussion board is another way to encourage your audiences to discuss issues you raise. It can also serve as an excellent source of informal market research.

“Producing a blog or podcast series is an excellent way to encourage and shape dialogue about topics important to you.”

ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE: A NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

Developing or expanding a wiki is a less popular, but potentially powerful way to deliver content. For example in April 2006, employees at IBM helped to increase knowledge about how healthcare information technology can improve treatment and advance medical care by coproducing a "Blogposium." Jack Mason of IBM Strategic Communications and author of the blog Healthnex (<http://healthnex.typepad.com>) invited healthcare bloggers to contribute articles to the Clinical Informatics Wiki (http://www.informatics-review.com/wiki/index.php/Main_Page). People could choose to write about a range of topics, including biobanking and genetic testing.

The blogposium was a great success. It attracted dozens of bloggers and reinforced IBM's leadership position in healthcare.

- **Stage V – Measure Audience Response:** The final stage of any communications campaign should be measurement. Key criteria can include:
 - **Media Coverage:** How many people viewed articles written in traditional and social media on campaign-related topics?
 - **Advertising Reach:** How many people viewed an advertisement and clicked through to a Website?
 - **Tone Of Coverage:** Was coverage on online and offline media positive, negative or neutral?
 - **Audience Response:** What did people *do* because of a campaign? How many purchased a product, wrote a letter, visited a clinic, etc?

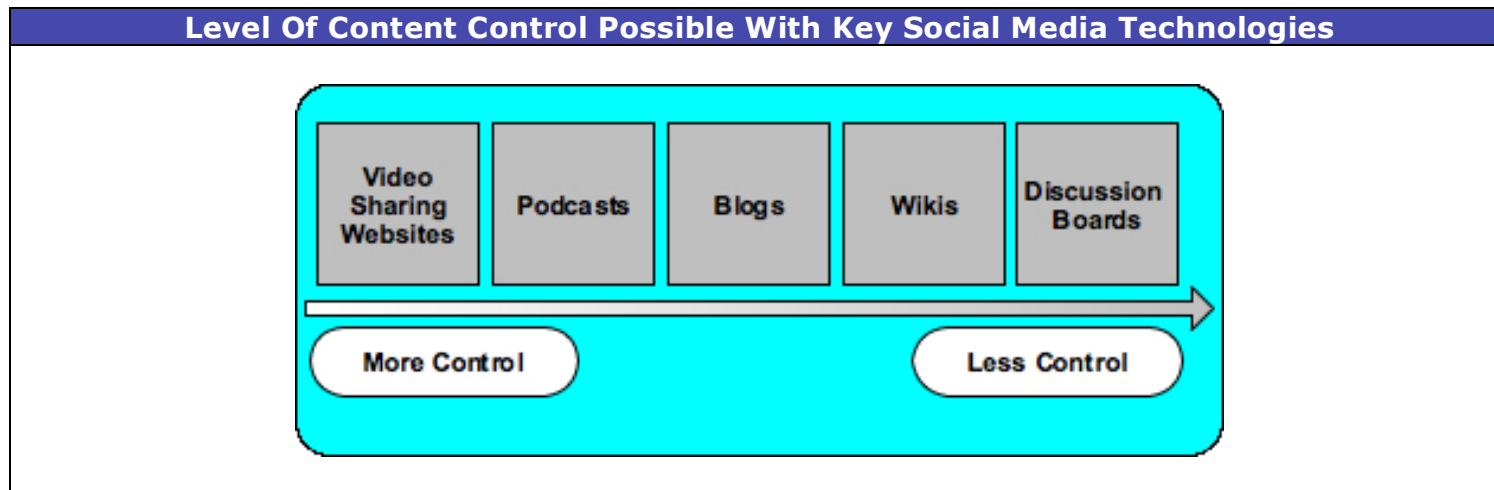
"If a communications campaign is not measured, it is not complete."

PRODUCING SOCIAL MEDIA AND RETAINING CONTROL OF CONTENT

Although the command and control strategy will become less effective as social media increases in influence, it will still be possible to maintain some “ownership” of healthcare messages. One way to achieve this is to purchase advertising. Another method is to develop social media that provides a measure of control over content and dialogue.

Content control is especially important for those in highly regulated sectors of the healthcare industry. Producing social media that enables them manage how information is distributed and the level of audience response will help them reap the benefits of these technologies while minimizing the risks.

The graphic below shows the types of social media that provide the highest and lowest levels of content control.



PRODUCING SOCIAL MEDIA AND RETAINING CONTROL OF CONTENT

Social media technologies that provide a **high level of control** include:

- **Video Sharing Websites:** Producers of video content can post material directly to a video sharing Website. Viewers cannot edit content directly. However, they often provide commentary on videos that is available for others to review.
- **Podcasts:** Podcast developers can exercise complete control over content. They can also choose whether to accept listener feedback and what comments to include in future podcasts.

Social media tools that provide a **lower level of control** include:

- **Blogs:** Bloggers control what content is posted to their blogs. However, it is standard practice for them to invite commentary from readers. Bloggers often reserve the right to moderate comments and sometimes decide not to accept them. However, closing comments defeats the primary purpose of a blog, which is to encourage conversation and debate.
- **Wikis:** The purpose of a wiki is to tap into the “wisdom of crowds” by giving a variety of users the opportunity to contribute and edit content. While many administrators of wikis only allow pre-approved visitors to edit content, vandals sometimes deface them by posing as legitimate users. Because of this, it can be time consuming to maintain a wiki.
- **Discussion Boards:** A key characteristic of discussion boards is their freewheeling and open atmosphere. While it is common to edit comments posted to bulletin boards, the most successful forums are lightly moderated.

**“Podcasts and video sharing Websites provide
the highest level of content control.”**

THE ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE STRATEGY AT WORK: HEALTHCARE NON-PROFIT CASE STUDY

Although they would not say they were following the engage and encourage strategy, some healthcare organizations have implemented it successfully. Read these case studies to find out how they did it.

Case Study I: Non-profit Organization
<p>Organization: Easter Seals Camp ASCCA</p> <p>Easter Seals Camp ASCCA, based in Jacksons Gap, Alabama, provides disabled children and adults with a number of services year-round, including camping and education.</p>
<p>Purpose Of Communications Campaign</p> <p>Like many non-profit organizations, Camp ASCCA must attract community support and inform the public about its services. Because it is difficult to illustrate the camping experience via brochures and other traditional communications vehicles, the camp’s leadership decided to use social media.</p>
<p>Examples Of Engagement</p> <p>Camp ASCCA continually promotes its activities. In addition, Robert French of Auburn University regularly writes about the camp on his blog, InfOpinions? www.auburnmedia.com/wordpress/.</p>
<p>Examples Of Encouragement</p> <p>The centerpiece of Camp ASCCA’s social media communications effort is its multi-faceted blog, the Camp ASCCA Journal. The blog features podcasts, videos and other social/multimedia that visitors can view to learn more about the camp.</p>
<p>Learn More</p> <p>Camp ASCCA Journal: www.campascca.org/journal/about/</p>

**THE ENGAGE & ENCOURAGE STRATEGY AT WORK:
PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY CASE STUDY**

Case Study II: Pharmaceutical Company
<p>Company, Disease & Project: Gilead Sciences; Hepatitis B; StopHep B</p> <p>The StopHepB campaign is a Gilead Sciences sponsored program that uses community partnerships and online education to improve awareness and testing for hepatitis B.</p>
<p>Purpose Of Communications Campaign</p> <p>There is a high prevalence of hepatitis B in the Asian American population. Despite this, there is very little conversation about the illness in this community. In addition, Hepatitis is a "silent disease" with few symptoms. As a result, many are not aware they have it.</p>
<p>Examples Of Engagement</p> <p>Gilead Sciences publicized the program by reaching out to traditional mainstream and ethnic media.</p>
<p>Examples Of Encouragement</p> <p>Gilead developed an interactive Website, StopHepB.com. The Website features information and resources about Hepatitis B. Gilead encourages people to educate others about the disease by becoming "Hep B Warriors." These "warriors" agree to inform family, friends and community groups about the disease. The Website also features a discussion board that warriors can use to get advice from experts and talk to others about Hepatitis B.</p>
<p>Learn More</p> <p>StopHepB Website: www.stophepb.com StopHepB News Release: www.gilead.com/wt/sec/pr_815489</p>

CONCLUSION

Command and control communications is still effective. However, as social media becomes more influential in healthcare its relevance will decrease. **The time to start developing a strategy for communicating successfully in this new environment is now.**

However, it is important to remember that although we are entering a new world, the old rules still apply. Whether you work with a journalist, produce a podcast, write a blog or develop a commercial, the objective is still the same. Effective communications is about getting people to pay attention and take action.

Don't be overwhelmed by social media. The communications tool used is less important than the results achieved.

“Remember, we may live in a new world, but the old rules still apply. Powerful communications has *always* been about getting people to pay attention and take action. The engage and encourage strategy is just another means of achieving the same objective.”

RESOURCES: PART I OF II

Want to learn more? Consult the following free and premium resources for more information about social media.

Resources
<p>Blogs</p> <p>Envision Solutions: <i>The Emerging Healthcare Blogosphere: What Is It & Why Does It Matter?</i> Website: www.envisionsolutionsnow.com/spotlight.html</p> <p>Edelman: <i>Trust "MEdia": How Real People Are Finally Being Heard</i> Website: http://www.edelman.com/image/insights/content/ISwp_TrustMEdia_FINAL.pdf#search=%22%22Trust%20MEdia%22</p>
<p>Podcasts</p> <p>Oneupweb: <i>Consider Podcasting: A Powerful Addition To Your Integrated Online Marketing Efforts</i> Website: www.oneupweb.com/landing/oneupweb/podcast/index.htm</p> <p>eMarketer: <i>Podcasting: Who's Tuning In?</i> Website: www.emarketer.com/Reports/All/Podcasting_mar06.aspx</p>

RESOURCES: PART II OF II

Resources
<p>Social Media</p> <p>SHIFT Communications: <i>PR 2.0 Essentials: A Necessarily Living Document</i> Website: www.shiftcomm.com/downloads/pr2essentials.pdf</p> <p>Cymfony: <i>Making The Case For A Social Media Strategy</i> Website: www.cymfony.com/files/pdf/making%20the%20case.pdf</p>
<p>Video Sharing Websites</p> <p>Miami Herald: <i>Online Video Vault: YouTube Is Place To See & Be Seen</i> Website: http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/business/15439944.htm</p> <p>Seattle Times: <i>Advertisers Use Internet To Help Shape Their Campaigns</i> Website: http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=netads04&date=20060904&query=YouTube</p>
<p>Wikis</p> <p>Forbes.com: <i>Extreme Blogging</i> (This article focuses on wikis) Website: www.forbes.com/best/2004/1213/bow001.html</p>

ABOUT ENVISION SOLUTIONS

Envision Solutions, LLC is a full-service healthcare marketing communications consulting firm. We focus on providing innovative products and services to not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. We exist to help make our clients more efficient and successful.

Envision Solutions' core competencies are in the areas of analysis, strategic/tactical recommendation development, training and content development.

Visit www.envisionsolutionsnow.com for more information about the firm.

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