







Ethics, Media and Communication

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Hacking Is Not in the Sustainability Dictionary

*Not only was the world shocked by the revelations in 2011 in the UK of the prevalence of hacking by journalists, I was disappointed that News Corporation, established and managed by Rupert Murdoch, seemed to be directly implicated in phone hacking to get access to people. Freedom of information was not the issue, but a serious invasion of privacy by illegal means. It wasn't long ago when I was praising News Corp for setting an example through its commitment to go carbon neutral. I think I created something of a stir in my newsletter **abc carbon express** on 25 July 2011 with this hard-hitting headline...*





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As we sit and watch Parliamentary Inquiries on live TV and see Rupert Murdoch and his son James put through the hoops by earnest MPs, and we learn day by day of further resignations and arrests, we can only wonder where this will lead to.

Such behaviour by numerous journalists from more than one newspaper, who not only invade the privacy of innocent individuals, but also use all sorts of illegal means to gain incriminating evidence or gossip, is not to be condoned in any way whatsoever.

Now, you well ask, what this has to do with **abc carbon express** or Sustain Ability Showcase Asia (SASA).

Sustainability goes beyond helping the environment and committing to charitable causes.

In a business sense, it involves CSR, governance, ethics and transparency. It impacts on labour policies and trade practices. It means running the business in a sustainable way for the benefit of all stakeholders, not just major shareholders.

We need to see the corporate world, including media owners, committing to genuine sustainability and setting some high standards in the boardrooms, offices, newsrooms, factories, as well as through their communications.

As someone who has worked in the communications industry — media, publishing and public relations — for 51 years, I cannot but be horrified at the revelations in the ongoing “hacking and denial” saga unfolding in the UK, involving Murdoch-owned News Corporation newspapers.



Of course, many will try to dismiss it as “quite normal” goings-on to be expected of the tabloids, also known as “gossip” and “gutter” press. But such behaviour by numerous journalists from more than one newspaper, who not only invade the privacy of innocent individuals, but also use all sorts of illegal means to gain incriminating evidence, is not be condoned in any way whatsoever. And to learn that police members have been bribed and private investigators paid to solicit all sort of unsavoury facts and fantasies, is beyond belief.

More press freedom or less? More resignations and arrests? The downfall of a media empire? More revelations of cosy relationships between politicians, police and media?

Media and public relations (PR) people — working for police, the government, business or media — have never enjoyed a guilt free existence or lily-white reputation. But as someone who has worked in and with the media, I have often come to the defense of the professionalism and dedication of many fine men and women, who are doing their job — often in trying and tiring circumstances — to bring news, facts, comments, features and visuals to the general public.

There is now, obviously, a very large credibility gap which seems impossible to fill. But we must not lump every journalist in the same heap of “hacks”. (The uninitiated might be interested to know that journalists are often — amongst themselves — described as “hacks”, but whichever meaning you take from the Oxford Dictionary, none refer to the disgusting practice of illegally “hacking” into private phones and computers.)

We need to put this in perspective. We have all heard of unsavoury and illegal behaviour coming from various professionals. There have been rogue doctors, lawyers, accountants, bankers — even politicians. But we don’t put the whole profession in the “bad basket”.

So let’s hear it from the very professional, capable and ethical journalists and PR people. And let’s expect — and even encourage — the authorities to deal very firmly and finally with those amongst them, be they from the media, government, legal profession, PR or the police, for their crimes.

There is a connection between media, communication, ethics and sustainability — a few actually:

- The News Corporation has been rated very highly for its commitment to deal with climate change. It was announced by Rupert Murdoch

himself in May 2007 that the global empire would become carbon neutral by 2010. It achieved that and set some very good examples around the world.

- Sustainability, we must re-emphasise, involves CSR, governance, ethics and transparency. It means running the business sustainably for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. The Dow Jones Sustainability Index measures performance in all these areas.
- A few years back I wrote an article for the *Journal of Communication Management* on ethics, highlighting key areas for professional communicators: cultural practices, personal, professional, political, religious, racial, trade, business, legal, financial, environmental and social.
- Recently, I gave a paper to the Sustainable Energy Association of Singapore on the four E's of Sustainability — Environment, Economy, Ethics and Energy. This goes beyond the accepted triple bottom line, to give added emphasis to energy and ethics as critical factors.

We need to see the corporate world, including media owners, committing to genuine sustainability — the four E's of sustainability — and setting some high standards of ethical practice.

This has added relevance, not only as I edit and produce an online newsletter — thus I am “in the media” and consider myself a journalist (what I was trained to be many years ago) — but I also practice as a sustainability advisor and directly assist companies in the sustainability sector, which incorporates energy efficiency, carbon measurement, clean tech, clean energy, water and waste management. And not forgetting ethical behavior!

Phone Hacking: How the *Guardian* broke the story is available on Kindle, or go to its website for more information.



Sources



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Hackathon as
a Means to Reduce
Our Environmental
Impact



*I attended the final presentation of entries in the Hackathon on Reducing Our Environmental Impact in January 2013. Very enlightening! Nothing to do with hacking of the “evil” sort we are seeing, as nothing but good is coming from this form of technological communication. I greatly admire the work of Newton Circus, UP Singapore and in particular, the guiding hand of Daryl Arnold. This is based on an article contributed first to the E2 Singapore website but also used in **abc carbon express** and other places...*

ING OUR ITAL IMPACT THON



Hackathons have arrived in Singapore and they are being put to good use. The “Clean and Green Hackathon” was organised by the National Environment Agency (NEA) in April 2013 in partnership with Newton Circus “to create solutions that safeguard the environment and conserve precious resources”.

The previous Hackathon, also organised by Newton Circus through its UP Singapore initiative, took place in January this year, carrying the theme “Reducing Our Environmental Impact”. Organised in partnership with the NUS Entrepreneurship Centre and Earth Hour, games and apps were being developed to highlight energy efficiency.

So what is a Hackathon? Also known as a hack day, hackfest or codefest, it is an event in which computer programmers and others in the field of software development, as well as graphic designers, interface designers and project managers collaborate intensively on software projects.

Moving Eco-Actions Beyond an Hour with Mobile Applications

The January Hackathon produced ideas and apps which were creative and practical, encouraging greater public participation in energy saving and events like Earth Hour.

At the launch, Andy Ridley, CEO and co-founder of Earth Hour, said the “I Will If You Will” campaign was a way to promote positive environmental action beyond an hour each year. The premise is simple: someone promises to do something if a set number of



people commit to an ongoing action for the environment, beyond Earth Hour.

What came out of the Hackathon was a winning idea. Called “5 Degrees”, it involved a mobile app game of environmentally friendly activities. Based on the “I Will If You Will” campaign, users send pre-defined challenges to their friends through mobile devices and social media, which are measurable in categories such as energy and water efficiency.

For example, putting at stake a population of pandas under the threat of global warming, users will alleviate their condition by completing eco-friendly challenges with friends. This visualisation of completed challenges engages users and lets them see their progress.

Leveraging on the user’s social and viral dynamics, the app can reach out to those previously unaware of the Earth Hour campaign. Its accessibility and interactivity also attract new users keen to help the environment.

Upon completing a challenge, verified by photos and peer-checks, users receive points to unlock new challenges. Along with constant challenges and counter-challenges from social networks, this app stays engaging.

By completing many challenges after challenges aimed to enhance energy efficiency over an extended period, users eventually cultivate the habit of efficient energy use. The app is an effective platform to encourage the public to make significant reductions in their environmental impact.

Other ideas raised in the competitive atmosphere of the Hackathon are also aimed at increasing energy efficiency.

“Aircon+3” is an air conditioning management system that monitors energy use, monetary savings, building temperature and user feedback. Another was “eSave”, an energy monitoring and user collaboration portal.

By bringing together thinkers and solvers across disciplines (sustainability experts, programmers, web designers and marketers), the Hackathon successfully generated multiple solutions for today’s global warming challenges. Many ideas involved community engagement to induce behaviour change and enhance awareness.

Over 120 people attended the January Hackathon, totalling over 2,000 hours of voluntary work.



Hothouse of Ideas for a Cleaner and Greener Singapore

For the “Clean and Green Hackathon”, from 26–28 April, participants examined many interesting datasets and collaborated to create solutions that safeguard the environment and conserve precious resources. Open to amateurs and professionals, students and working adults, developers, environmental activists, and creative and concerned citizens jointly built solutions for the public to safeguard and nurture Singapore’s environment.

The scope of the “Data Sandbox” was also extended to include data from NEA and other agencies. Using this, participants were also challenged to test out latest technologies to help individuals and businesses optimise energy usage, and tackle environmental challenges creatively.

Participants could also try the impressive technology on offer from Samsung, Amazon Web Services (AWS), and SAP, including SAP HANA One (an in-memory computing platform, hosted on AWS’s public cloud) and SAP Visual Intelligence, a powerful query and visualisation tool.

The Clean and Green Hackathon was designed to engage communities in Singapore to co-create solutions towards the challenge of resource conservation and protecting the environment.

UP Singapore is a ground-up innovation platform that creatively uses data and technology to improve urban environments. It seeks active community participation and strong collaboration across communities, governments, corporate and NGOs. It is managed by Newton Circus. An interview with Daryl Arnold also appeared on UBrain TV.

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How to Communicate Sustainability and Do It Sustainably

I agreed to write an article on sustainable communication for the Institute of Public Relations Singapore (IPRS) newsletter and it appeared in July 2011.

I also organised a lunch panel on sustainability which featured Straits Times journalist Jessica Cheam, CDL Sustainability chief Esther An, and Howard Shaw, the former director of the Singapore Environment Council and now the Corporate Social Responsibility head at the Halcyon Group. Besides journalism and media, I do have a "history" in public relations and in fact served as President of the IPRS for a time. I have also been involved in public relations in Australia and NZ and lectured on the topic at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia...



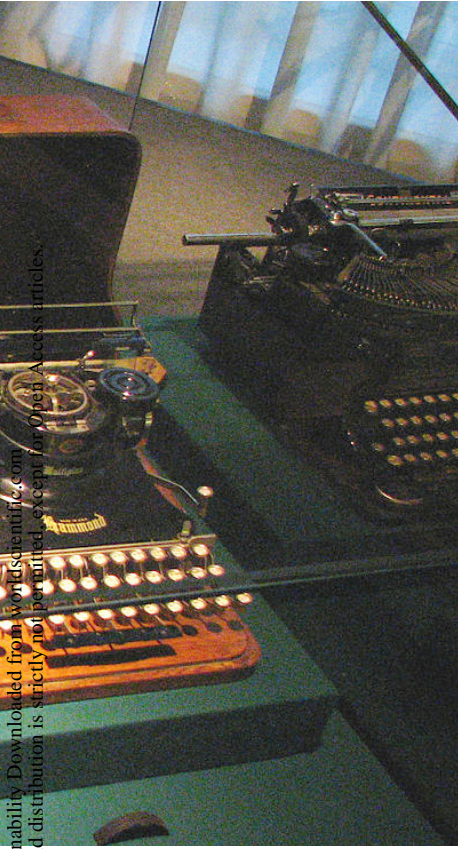


Photo by Корзун Андрей (2009) taken from Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0): www.commonswiki.org/wiki/File:Typewriters_01.JPG.

Sustainability means different things to different people. To some it is all about the environment and being green. Others see it as another word for corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Some sum it up as the triple bottom line — concerned with economic, environmental and social factors in business. A sustainable society is said to cover people, planet and profit.

In 1986, the Brundtland Commission defined “sustainable development” as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The much respected Dow Jones Sustainability Index talks about corporate sustainability as “a business approach that creates long-term shareholder value by embracing opportunities and managing risks deriving from economic, social and environmental developments”.

Sustainability has become “a defining megatrend of the 21st century”, according to business schools and noted commentators. The chairman of Ford Motor Company Bill Ford himself says sustainability is the biggest issue facing global business this century.

So with all these definitions and comments on its importance, shouldn't we as communication professionals in Singapore be sitting up and taking notice — and action!

To some extent we are. It is interesting to see that many communication and public relations professionals here and around the world are getting CSR and sustainability responsibility added to their job description.

Because when you think about it — and in my experience — communication makes up a large part of the task in delivering a sustainability practice for any business.

But let me first broaden the concept of sustainability a little. Instead of three essential pillars, I make it four.

To me there are the four E's of sustainability:

- Environment;
- Economy;
- Ethics; and
- Energy.

I have added Energy to the mix because it is essential in this day and age to manage energy more effectively, along with all the other resources a business utilises. Energy is critical as it also determines the carbon footprint for the business.

Ethics is a better word to use when it comes to business than just “social” which can mean just giving to charity. Whereas ethics covers corporate governance, transparency, and all the ways a business must operate, taking into account different legal, cultural, social, racial and religious situations.

Singapore has certainly embarked on the sustainability journey. The Singapore Business Federation (SBF) has for the second year presented deserving businesses and government agencies with Singapore Sustainability Awards. A book of case studies of 2010 winners was titled “Riding the Megatrend of Sustainability”.

The Singapore Compact for CSR — bringing together the government, employers and unions — recognises the importance of sustainability with two books of cases studies of Singapore businesses. There's “CSR for Sustainability and Success”, produced in 2009, and “Socially Responsible and Sustainable”, produced earlier this year (2011).

The Singapore Exchange has just released a “how-to” guide so firms can prepare sustainability reports and it wants all listed firms to produce such reports. Some are already doing it. I just saw the latest report from Keppel Corporation, for example.

So where do communication and public relations professionals come in?

If you haven't already been given the job of masterminding sustainable practices in your place of employment — whether it is a government agency, PR consultancy, multi-national corporation or small and medium enterprise — make it your job to find out who is doing it. If no one is, you should step in to make sure it is happening.

But it is not just a matter of seeing what clean and green things your business is already doing. It must come from the top. Your board, your directors, CEO or MD, must be convinced that it is important and you as a key communicator must make sure that all stakeholders are aware of the commitments your business is making to become sustainable.

If you need guidance, there is plenty of good advice and practical tips from the Singapore Compact books and from the SBF.

There are a number of agencies around specialising in helping companies get to grips with sustainability. I would include Paia, Kleef Consulting, Sustainable PR, CSR Asia, GreenBizCheck, as well as my own consultancy SASA.

Then there are organisations like the Singapore Environment Council which helps business on the sustainability journey through its Eco Office and Eco Food Court programmes.

Then you can look at some of the best examples in the world — Interface, GE, Walmart and Marks & Spencers — who have progressed dramatically on this journey and set very high standards.

Winning awards and recognition locally and globally is only part of it. Gaining a reputation as a sustainable and responsible organisation is something you have to work hard at. But communication is the key.

Commit to sustainability and communicate what you are doing internally and externally.



Sources

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Profile — Ken Hickson: Harnessing the Media to Fight Climate Change

I was visiting Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia to promote the upcoming CleanEnviro Summit 2012 where I was asked to give a presentation on waste and why waste management was so important. Surprisingly, I was interviewed by Siaw Mei Li and the subsequent article appeared Green Prospects Asia (29 April 2012). There was also an interview with the New Straits Times. I say surprisingly, because it is rare for journalists to end up being interviewed. Not because they don't have anything worthwhile to say. So, in place of me writing about myself in profile, I pass that task to Mei Li. Also, because I cannot complain that she misrepresented me in anyway...



Photograph by Bryan Loke Design of Ken Hickson, the journalist (with microphone), at the Sir Richard Branson/Carbon War Room media conference at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore, May 2013.

Over the course of his long career, veteran sustainability communicator Ken Hickson has witnessed many significant developments in environmental issues as well as in the media. He talks to Siaw Mei Li about how harnessing modern communications can help save the planet.

“I started out as a journalist 50 years ago this year,” Ken Hickson reveals cheerfully, noting with a quick look around that he must be the oldest in the room. “Now I’ve made the transition from being a print or newspaper journalist to an online journalist, I’ve become reasonably modern!”

And so he has. In addition to providing sustainability communications services to corporations and government agencies, the founder and chief executive officer of Singapore-based consultancy Sustain Ability Showcase Asia (SASA) tweets periodically and helms SASA’s twice-monthly email news digest on climate change issues.

Lately, he was also involved in promoting the Singapore National Environment Agency’s (NEA) inaugural CleanEnviro Summit and the WasteMET Asia exhibition and conference, the latter of which is co-organised by the Waste Management and Recycling Association of Singapore (WMRAS). Both events took place in the first week of July (2012) in conjunction with Singapore International Water Week and the World Cities Summit.



Wanted: Integrated Solutions

Hickson sees a much-needed synergy in this upcoming events cluster. “We’ve got to accept that there’s a nexus between climate change and energy, water and the environment. We can no longer say, ‘I’m just dealing with water here’ or ‘I’m just dealing with food here.’”

“Climate change has an impact on all of that, and waste is a component we have to deal with much better in terms of using it for energy and also reducing the amount of waste we create. It’s not something we should be dumping or filling up holes in the ground or our water resources with; we should be converting it to energy — using it as a resource.”

While some of the information that Hickson receives in his work may sound worrying, the business and social potential in turning such problematic situations around are also tremendous. As an example, he relates how experts at the recent Reuters Food and Agriculture Summit in Chicago reported that an estimated 30 to 50% of the food produced in the world goes uneaten and ends up in landfills.

“We’ve got to better manage our production, distribution, buying and consumption habits, and also how we manage waste,” says Hickson, citing waste minimisation and reutilisation projects such as converting used cooking oil into biofuel, running community and commercial composting initiatives, and salvaging discarded supermarket food items not yet past their due date, to be channeled to the needy via charitable organisations.

In other words, resolving the food waste problem creatively means not only feeding more people, but also diverting waste from landfills and supplementing the society’s need for fuel and agricultural resources.

Nothing Wasted

These principles of maximising resources, avoiding waste, recycling and prolonging the useful life of a product apply equally well to the realm of climate change communications, particularly in the era of multi-platform communications.

“Some journalists may be writing for newspapers but their material is also being used online, and they’re also blogging and working with social media,” Hickson points out, giving as an example, veteran journalist Michael Richardson, whose work on climate change and alternative fuels enriches regional think tanks while also reaching wider audiences in the form of the Singapore *Straits Times*’ print and online readership.

Meanwhile, *Reuters* climate change correspondent David Fogarty’s journalism is disseminated not only by the agency’s newswire, but also reaches the public via the @reutersclimate Twitter profile. With each additional re-post, news and research gains longevity along with new audiences.

“You need to be working in all media that’s available,” says Hickson. “You might use social media to refer to an article that appears online or on a web portal that, in turn, comes from a newspaper. So nothing goes to waste — not even the work of journalists.”

Biodata of Ken Hickson

- Native of NZ, currently lives in Singapore;
- Governor of WWF Australia; and
- Author of *Flight 901 to Erebus*, a non-fiction account of a 1979 major airline disaster in the Antarctic.



Sources

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