EUROPEAN
communications

LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS

JEREMY BROWN OF COMPUTER ANSWERS ON THE WAY FORWARD IN THE BILLING ARENA

OUT OF THE INDUSTRIAL AGE
A NEW CALL CENTRE OUTLOOK

SMART INTEGRATION
MEDIATING BETWEEN THE NETWORK AND BACC

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THE NEED FOR BETTER MARKETING

WIRELESS WATCH: WIRELESS DATA . 3G SIM CARDS . CDMA . MOBILE SATELLITE . COMPETITIVE CONVERGENCE

Ready, Aim...Fire

What are the risks and public exposure which telecom companies face, that might pose a threat to their reputations? Elizabeth Howard and Wendy Rhein explore the possibilities

ctivism against corporations has taken many forms. There are the passionate activists like Edmond Morel, one of the first organizers against both European corporate and government activities in the Congo in the 1890's. One of Morel's staunchest supporters in the United States was the popular writer Mark Twain- who could attract crowds and attention in the newspapers.

In the early 1900's it was Mother Jones, the cheerfully vulgar, Cork born rabble-rouser, dressed in boots, granny glasses and a bonnet, who organized union strikes against the Rockefeller's mining operations in Colorado. In the early 1990's it was Ken Saro-Wiwa, a popular Nigerian television producer and globe trotting author of books and children's stories, who organized the Ogoni people in the Delta region of Nigeria to speak out against the environmental degradation resulting from oil extraction in Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa's execution led to an international protest against Royal-Dutch Shell.

Then there are the non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace, the environmental group, internationally recognized by corporate executives as "eco-terrorists". Their tactics include chaining themselves to oil rigs and swimming out in rubber rafts to attract media attention to situations that they believe are detrimental to the environment.

There are student demonstrations, and the media itself that, along with the internet, has a powerful, all-seeing eye.

Apparel industry manufacturers certainly understand the power of activism. For years, they have been under attack for producing clothing and shoes in "sweatshops" and for continually moving their operations from one developing country to another in search of cheaper labor in order to stay ahead of their competitors.

The oil extraction industry understands that objections to their operations is inherent in what they do. As one oil executive commented: "It's not as if oil is found in beach resorts." Shell, Exxon, Mobil, Chevron, Freeport McMoran, deBoers are generally regarded as "villains" in the eyes of the environmental activists and, more and more frequently, by human rights activists.

Consumer product companies, including pharmaceutical and food companies, recognize the risk they face when something

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goes wrong. The Coca-Cola debacle in Belgium is probably the most recent example of a food company confronting a risk, while others have included Nestle, Chiquita, and the specialty coffee company, Starbucks. Stirred in part by the general protest against genetically engineered food, consumer protests have erupted when revelations about labor violations and public health issues emerge.

What, you ask, is the relevance of this conversation to the communications technology sector? Do we really expect to see Greenpeace activities shimmying up the flagpole at Microsoft Headquarters in Seattle? Do we expect human rights organizations to be piling old computers in front of Intel headquarters, as Nike protestors have piled up used sneakers in front of NikeTowns across the country? With the shortage of engineers and companies that want to lure the best and the brightest away from the competition, wage is surely not an issue in Silicon Valley, but what about wages for engineers in Bangalore, India? When Intel set up operations in Costa Rica, it was noted that the move was as good for the economic development in that country as it was for Intel. But what happens to the Costa Rican economy when Intel moves out? Who is directing the economic development of that country, and does Intel have a role in that development?

A risk assessment takes a look at what could go terribly wrong. As the technology sector gains both in profitability and in its ability to affect change, should companies do an audit of their risks?

What are the risks and what should technology companies do in undertaking scenario planning?

Labor: As the technology sector offers good job opportunities for all, Reverend Jesse Jackson was in Silicon Valley in July campaigning around the issue that there are not enough minority engineers in the technology industry. Whether this is true or false, articles appeared in Business Week, The New York Times and other national publications.

Security: In an era of cold peace, a world where very few do not have access to nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and borderless conflicts have become the norm, security is major concern for all. And the technology sector can play a role in understanding how to set up secure systems. The computer technology sector also will need to address liability issues in the near future. Who is responsible for monitoring violence-provoking web pages, the sale of weapons online and the easily-accessible step by step directions for building bombs? The Columbine High School massacre in April 1999 demonstrated the power of the Internet to many parents in all too terrifying detail.

Privacy: As we are all connected at the hip electronically, do we have any autonomy? Do we have the right to privacy over email messages at work? At home? Within a network? What constitutes censorship in an electronic age?

Corporate philanthropy: Bill Gates, the wealthiest man on the planet, has recently created a billion-dollar foundation for education and is giving away money for the first time. Between the Gates dynasty and the wealth that has been created in Silicon Valley in the United States and in other parts of the world, someone will begin questioning the technology sector's responsibility to play a role in solving national and global problems. Many of these companies generate more money per year than the gross domestic products of developing countries. With the growing gap between the rich and the poor, will technology companies become more financially powerful than governments, and will the public look to them for leadership and a response to social problems instead from political officials?

Change agents: The hierarchical that is run from the top down, is the past. In the twenty-first century, it is the start-up technology companies that will be studied to understand how new corporations should be structured and managed. Where is the leadership?

A study undertaken by Royal-Dutch Shell and published in the 1997 book, Living Company, found that companies that grow and thrive over time have characteristics that are like a living organism. These include:

● Adaptivity to the outside world (learning);

● Character and identity (persons);

● Relationships with people and institutions inside and around itself (ecology);

● The way it develops over time (evolution).

Scenario planning, which takes an assessment of all the potential risks over time and factors in how the business, political and social environment may shift, is important for all industries.

We have designed a survey to study where the telecom industry fits in.

The survey seeks to identify the risks and concerns of technology companies and the solutions they are implementing. The survey also looks at corporate giving and how companies allocate their donation dollars, if at all.

If you would like to fill out the Survey Questionnaire on the next two pages, we would be very grateful. Please return your completed questionnaires to: ►

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