



The power of people

David Bowen

Transcript of day two keynote

I'm supposed to be talking today about the trends we've spotted from doing the FT Bowen Craggs Index for the past four years, and trying to work out which are sustainable and which are fads. I'm going to do that, sort of, but I'm not going to restrict myself to the last four years or even to our analysis of websites. And I'm not going to go into detail – there is a presentation in your pack that will, I hope, tell you a lot of useful things about the Index and what it has uncovered.

What I really want to do is to talk about people, because in the 17 years I've been watching the Internet, it's become ever more evident that the most important issue in this whole web thing is the people. I spend too much of my time staring at websites, but also a huge amount of it talking to people – and it's the goodies and the baddies who make the whole story so very interesting and, incidentally, control the FT Index and everything else about the corporate web.

Here's one person we should all give thanks to.



Figure 1 Tim Berners-Lee

He's called Tim Berners-Lee, and he decided he wanted to give jobs to thousands of his best friends, so he invented the worldwide web. We should all have a picture of him on the wall.

People like you

This is the next person or, rather, people: Marco Polo, Leonardo da Vinci and Job.



Figure 2 The corporate web manager?

Who do they represent? This is you. If you manage a large website, which most of you do, you should know that I am in awe of you. You have the many skills of Da Vinci, the diplomacy of Marco Polo and the patience of Job.

I know this, because I spend a lot of my time inside companies and other organisations, listening and talking.

I was sat in a meeting at a client company, talking about ways I thought its site should be developed. I was talking to a senior HR guy, who said that unfortunately 80 per cent of what I was proposing was illegal. He also said that my suggestion that the careers part of the site could be a made a bit more interesting was insulting. I looked across at the web managers, who shrugged – I know they will get their own way, but battling with people like that is just part of the job, as you know. I once asked Louise McGregor of ING what her main management tool was, and she said ‘charm’.

With the boss on your side

But actually the reason why the web managers in the first company will get their own way is simple – the boss is on their side. We have been and will be talking a lot about governance, but it’s absolutely clear to me that the first, second and third key to getting a web estate that works well is to have bosses who understand its importance.

The only thing better than this is for you to be the boss – or least senior enough to take big decisions and cut through internal politics. In my view, one of the main factors behind Shell coming at the top of our Index this year is that the head of web is only two levels below the chairman.

The Greenpeace imperative

Whatever, if a company has a good website, there has to be something that has put it at centre stage. It didn't start there – it can't have done, because the web's so new that it really wasn't very important for a while. It took something to give the boss or bosses a jolt that made them understand either its importance or its potential importance.

I'm pretty sure it was an unfortunate encounter Shell had with Greenpeace over the dumping of an oil platform that alerted its bosses to the importance of the web. Greenpeace ran rings round Shell, not just in rubber boats but on the web as well.

GREENPEACE BRENT SPAR PROTEST IN THE NORTH SEA



Greenpeace welcomes the "Scientific Group on Decommissioning" report [read the press release](#).

Visit our [Ken Saro Wiwa page](#) for information on Shell in Nigeria

Shell systematically polluted Aquifer in Turkey [read the press release](#) and [Greenpeace Summary](#)

Page last updated 22nd May 1996

On 16 February last year, Greenpeace learned that the UK government had granted permission for Shell Oil to dump a huge, heavily contaminated oil installation, the 4,000 tonne Brent Spar, into the North Atlantic despite it being loaded with toxic and radioactive sludge. Dumping operations, just west of Ireland and Scotland, were

Figure 3 The birth of online reputation management? Greenpeace used the web extensively in its Brent Spar campaign...



SHELL EXPRO

Brent Spar

Welcome to the Shell U.K. Exploration and Production ([Shell Expro](#)) Brent Spar Home Page. This site has been created to make information about the Brent Spar storage and tanker loading busy easily accessible, and to keep you up to date with the progress of our plans for its disposal and, in turn, to give you another means of sending us your views and questions.



These pages have been optimised for use with [Netscape 2.0](#). In order to view this site to its maximum we recommend the use of this browser.

Figure 4 ...and Shell responded, initially with a site dedicated to Brent Spar. No coincidence that it is still a leader

That was in 1996, and in 1998 Shell started Tell Shell, an interactive dialogue that was amazingly advanced, in fact way too advanced for its time. But, a couple of years after that, the current web director was put in place and he's been driving it ever since.

A lot later **Siemens** was also kicked into action. It needed to recover its reputation after the bribery scandal, and it had the good fortune of having a CEO in his early forties who understood the importance of the web.

Business objectives and support

BP got into it not because it had a shock, but because the then boss, John Browne, was on the board of Intel, and his mates there told him he should get into the web. Of course, this sort of boss-talking-to-boss thing happened a lot, but usually it meant that they would tell the IT department to put something together. Lord Browne was a bit more thoughtful than that – he told the head of external affairs, a pretty senior guy, to investigate and put a business plan together.

These three companies – Shell, Siemens, BP – have also had the resources they need to put together really impressive web estates. But there are sites that do really well – **Rio Tinto** is a good example – where the web manager is supported, but certainly doesn't have a big budget.



Figure 5 Three high-quality sites that have had the support they need

Betraying the corporate mind

But it's not just individuals that affect these things. The whole culture of the company and also the country is really important.

This is where I'd like to introduce you to a friend of mine. I don't know his name, but we could call him Phred because he is Phrenology man.

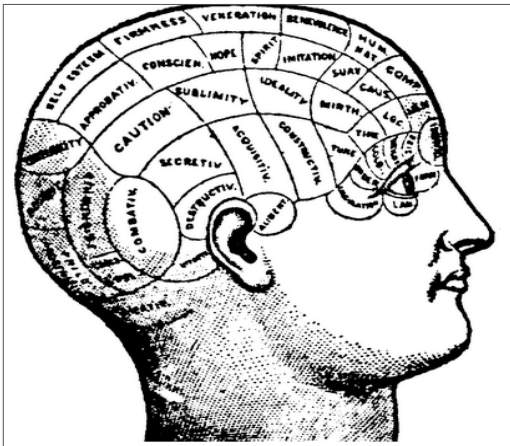


Figure 6 The phrenology man

Phrenology was a nineteenth century pseudo-science that said that you could read someone's character from the shape of their head – very useful if it worked.

Of course, it didn't, but what can work is web phrenology. This is a way of reading what's going on in a company by looking at its website or, rather, in the websites that make up its web estate. However hard the company tries to disguise it, its true character will nearly always come through simply because a web estate is so big and so complex that it has to reflect it.

The things it's particularly useful for spotting are who has the real power and if there are internal politics that stop people working together.

It also tends to reflect the culture or country the company comes from. I'll come on to that in a moment.

The improvement trend

If you want one big theme from the last decade, it's that corporate websites have been getting better. Not all, but most.

Isn't this just obvious, hardly worth mentioning? Maybe if you leave it at that, but there some interesting stories within it that I think are worth pointing to.

The first is to do with culture. As we have followed corporate websites, we've kept on seeing what appears to be a contradiction. Everyone knows the Americans are way ahead on the web. About five minutes after Tim Berners-Lee, who was a Brit, invented it and said it was open source, the Americans jumped in and started exploiting it like mad. You must all spend time reading blogs, tweets, whatever, and it's difficult not to feel you are in America, at least if you're using the English language.

So why is it that Americans companies do so badly in our Index. Nearly all the companies at the top of the list are European. What's going on?

I think there's a reason for that, which we can spot with a bit of phrenology.

The thing about Americans

The point is that the Americans are a practical lot. We may think of them as being glitzy, but America always strikes me as a country where functionality has a higher place than beauty for its own sake.

Which is why when the web was invented it was the Americans who grabbed it and started using it as a tool. They used it to serve customers and sell things, of course, but also to cut costs and increase efficiency in whatever way they could.

That was the good news. The bad bit was that they didn't realise that they would start to be judged by what they were doing on the web. Here was a giant window that allowed the world to stare right inside their organisations, but that didn't seem to bother them. Things like brand consistency weren't issues and the different bits of the company were pretty much allowed to do their own thing.



Figure 7 Your website is a 'picture window' into your organisation

General Electric always tended to be ahead of the game, and under the leadership of Jack Welch it saw the potential of the web to sell more, to sell anything... here it is offering to sell you a commercial aircraft from the main home page.

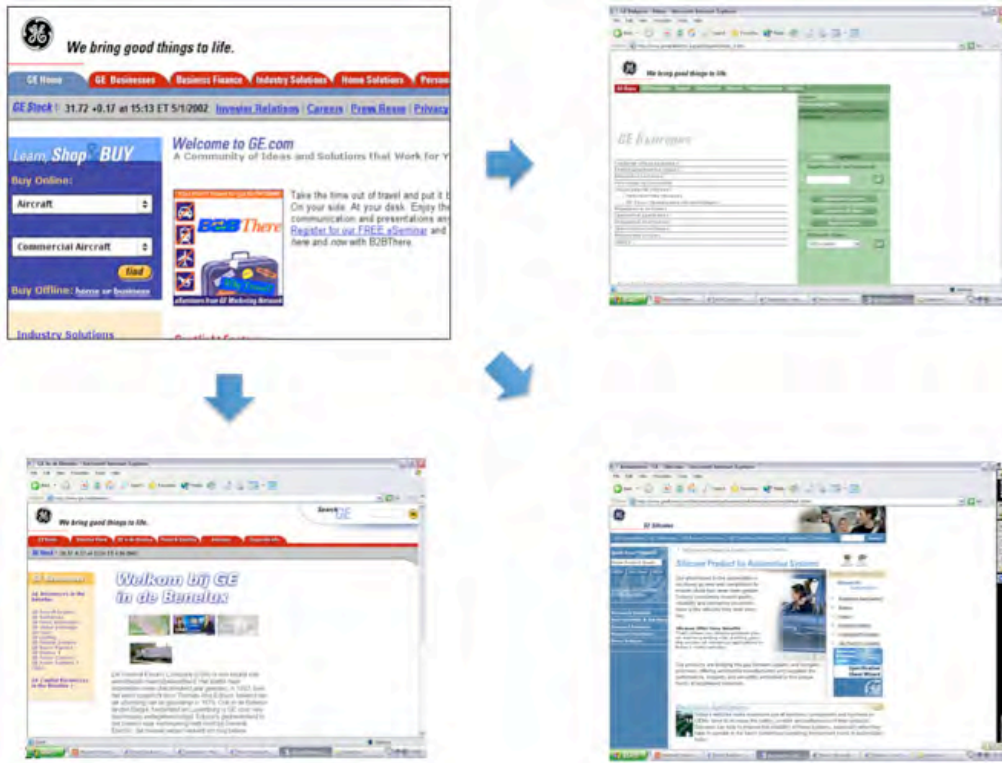


Figure 8 GE's home page and country/business sites, 2002. Journeys allow visitors to buy anything from the home page, but there's no brand consistency

But as you can see, brand consistency didn't come into the equation. This is from 2002, only eight years ago. I think what we see here is a company that has some very good ideas at the centre, but it all gets quite frayed when you get out into the subsidiaries. Which actually is quite odd, given GE's reputation for brilliant management processes. There's a bit of phrenology for you.

Even Procter & Gamble, which is about as consumery a company as you can get, was way ahead in using its site to talk to suppliers, but didn't give too much attention to what it looked like.

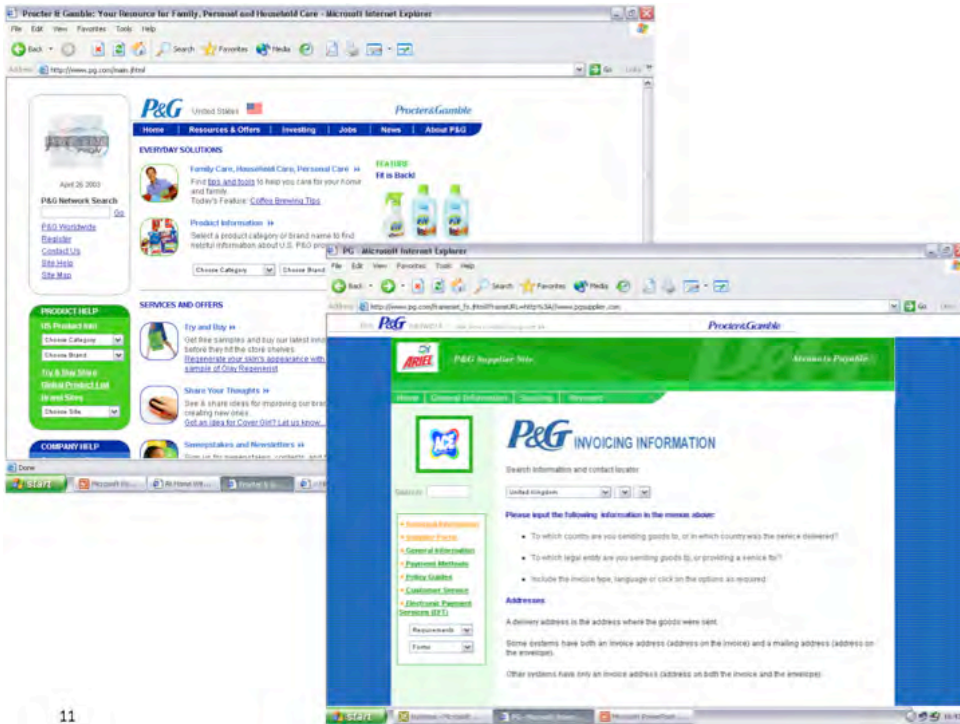


Figure 9 Procter & Gamble 2003 – a high functional suppliers' area, but little attention to look and feel

Meanwhile in Europe

By contrast, in Europe Nestlé was already more interested in using its site as a magazine, which meant the look and feel were always important.



Figure 10 Nestlé 2003: an early magazine approach

I think that's why Europeans were quicker to see that it made sense to have a coherent web estate that reflected well on the group, and made it look as though it was one group, rather than a jumble of more or less connected subsidiaries.

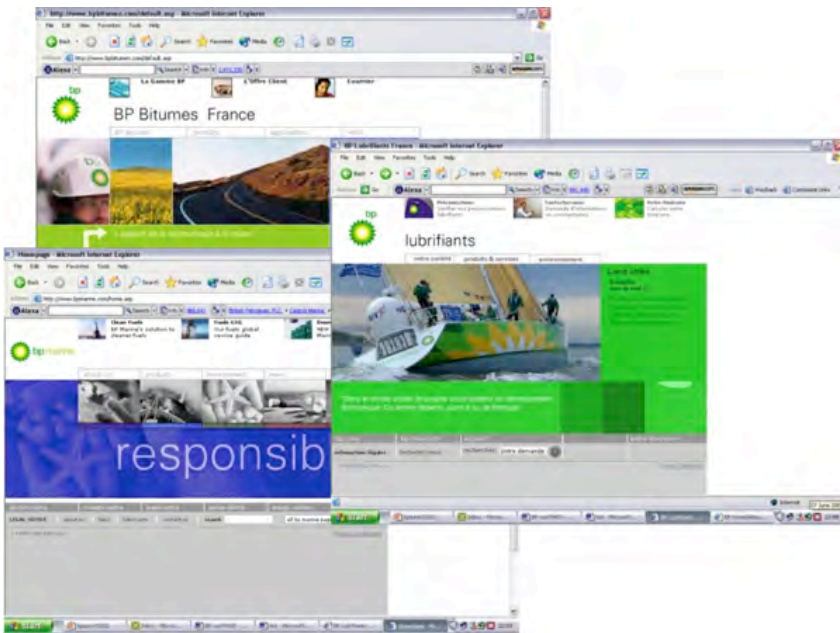


Figure 11 BP 2002

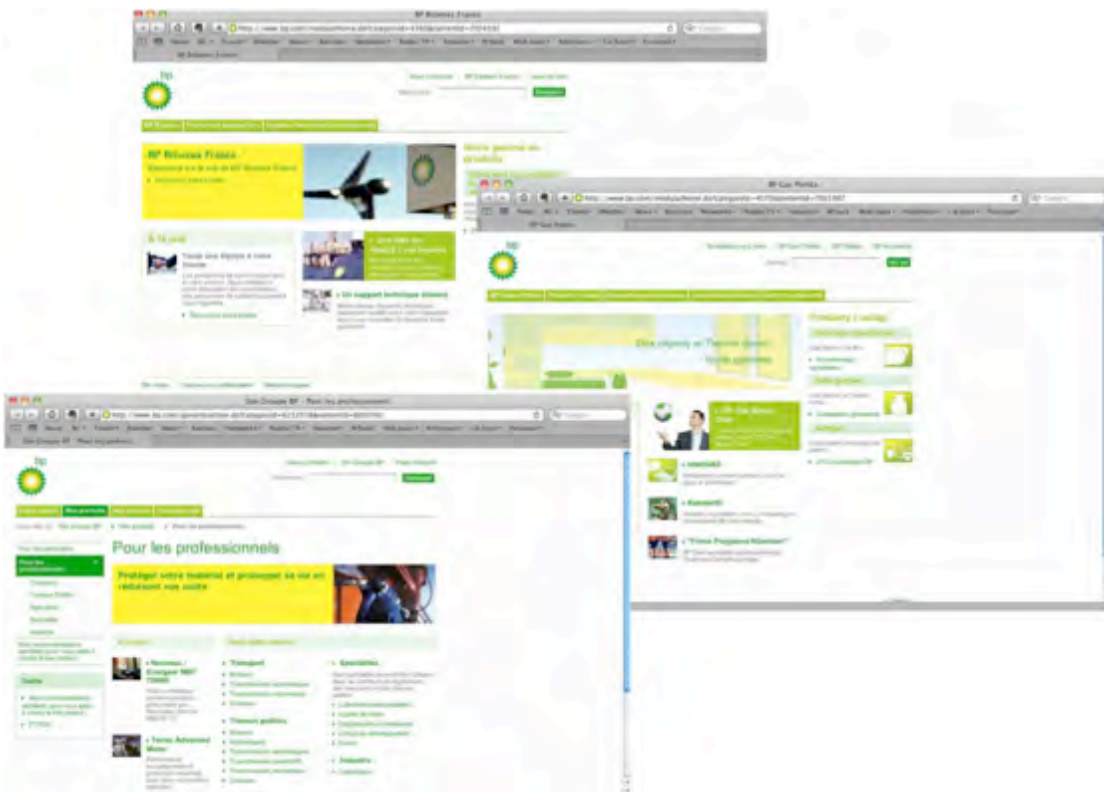


Figure12 BP 2010

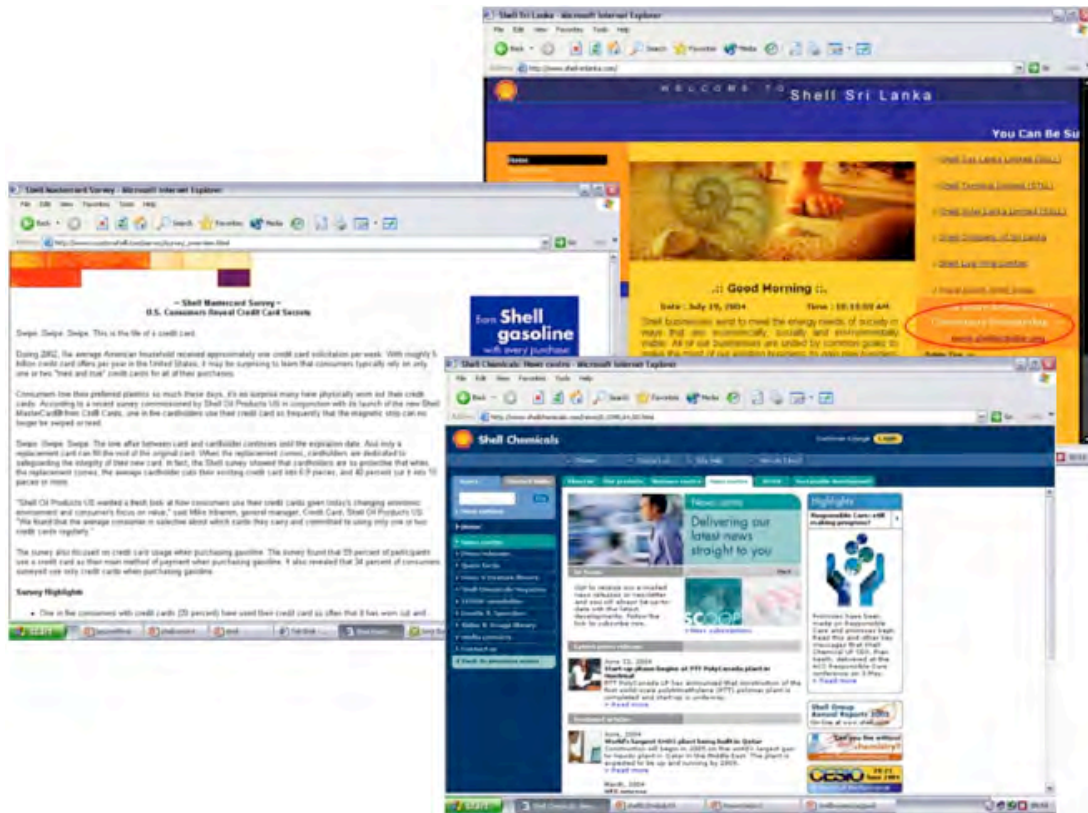


Figure 13 Shell 2004

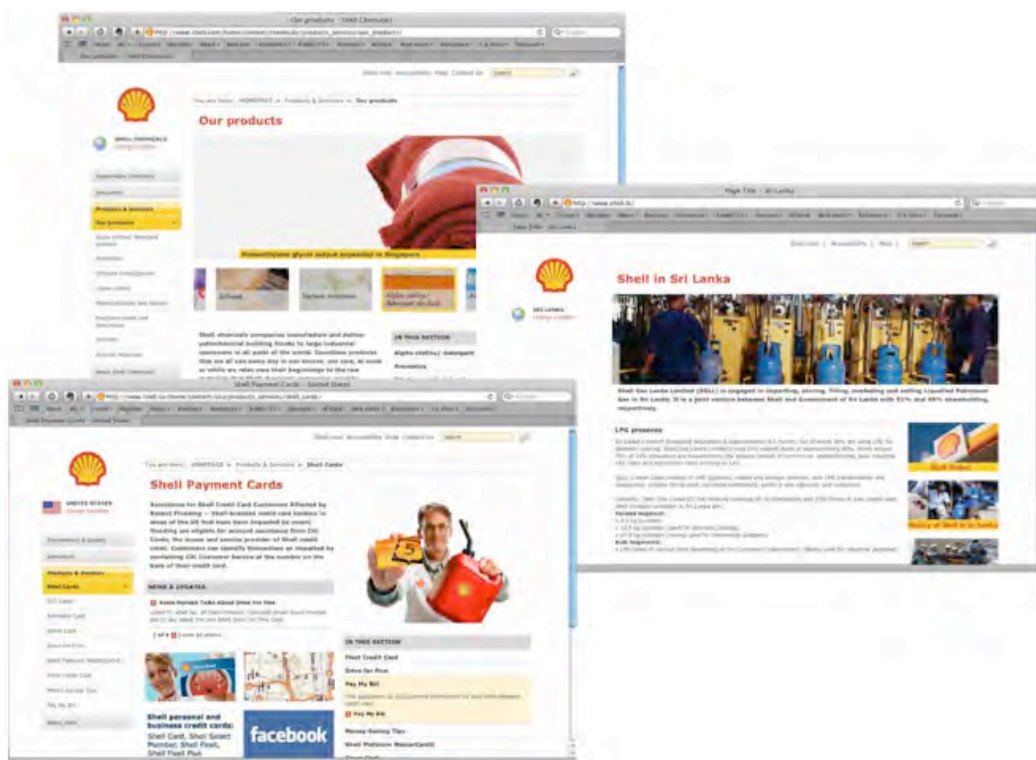


Figure 14 Shell 2010

The penny drops

What's interesting is that in the past few years, American bosses seem to have got it. There's been a huge amount of activity, pulling sites together so they not only work better, they look better. I don't know why this is – I'd like to think our Index could have something to do with it, but for whatever reason, there has been a lot of catch-up.

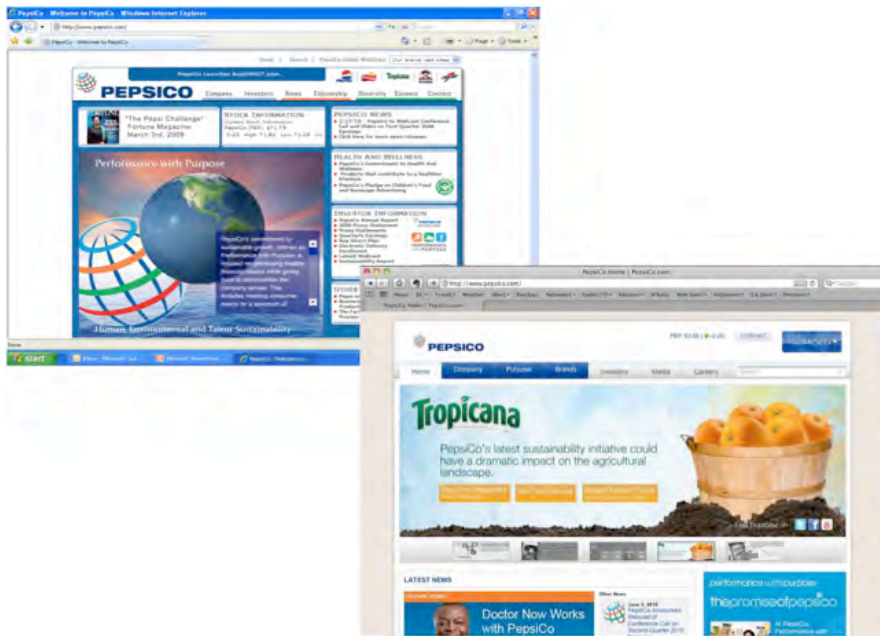


Figure 15 PepsiCo 2007 and 2010

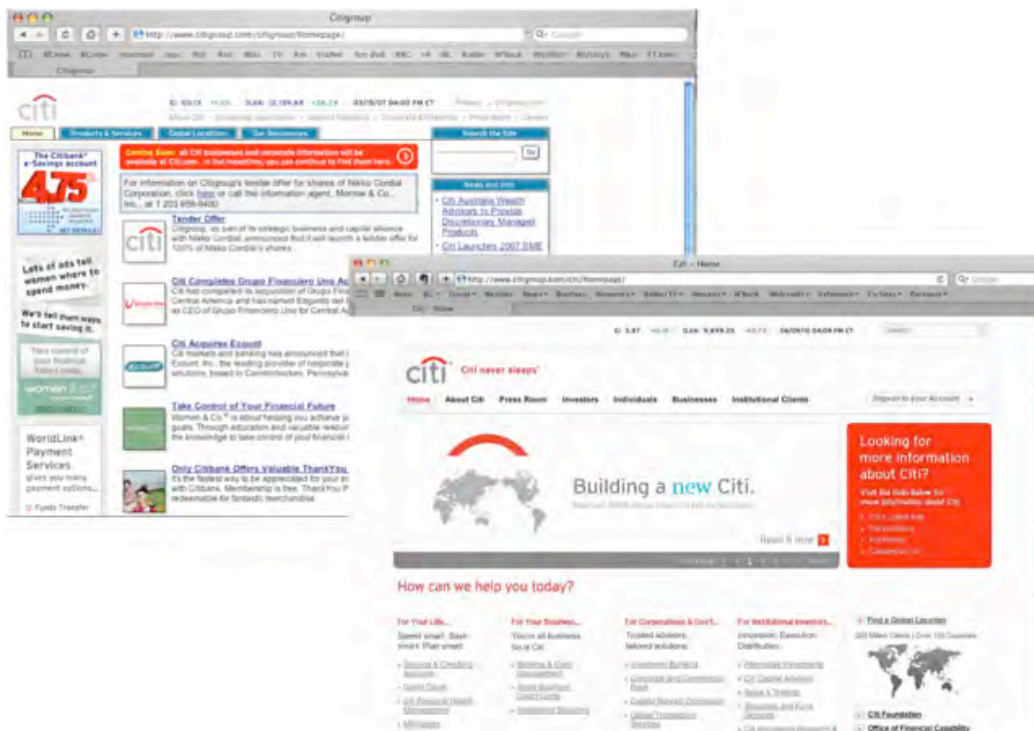


Figure 16 Citigroup 2007 and 2010



Figure 17 Johnson & Johnson 2007 and 2010 – the most spectacular US makeover



Figure 18 AT&T has just moved from a fragmented corporate site to a well-integrated one.

Big names stay the same

One of the oddities is that in the US even corporate sites were often federations of loosely connected sites. But it's not quite as simple as that. The most interesting companies are those that haven't changed – particularly as they are technological laggards like **Apple**, **Google** and **Microsoft**.

Here's the Apple site, which is pretty much impossible to move around unless you're a customer (in which case it's a dream).



Figure 19 Apple's corporate areas are still a nightmare to navigate between

And here's Google – different corporate areas, nothing except the basic template to hold them together and hardly any links between them.

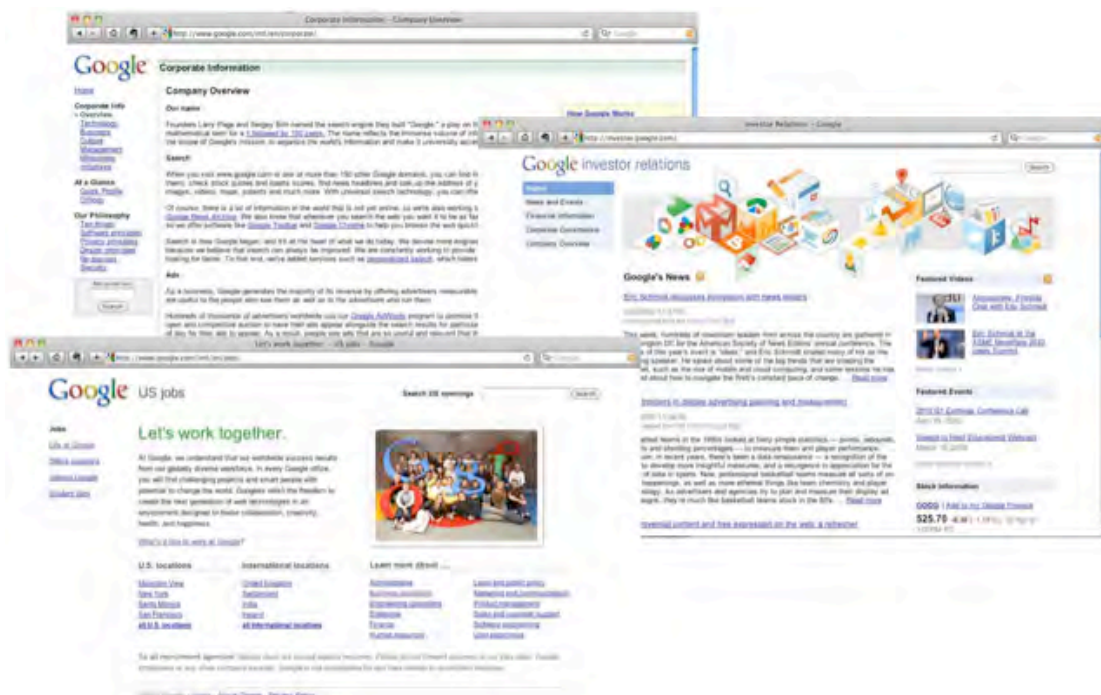


Figure 20 'Let's work together' is inappropriate – the different corporate areas in Google are quite different and barely linked. No links from IR to the About Google home page

We need phrenology here. Why are Apple and Google's corporate sites so bad? My theory is that it's because their philosophy is utterly decentralised – let people do their own thing – and this extends even to the corporate departments. I wonder if the press office and investor team talk to each other? They certainly don't seem to online.

Marketing forces

There's another reason, which certainly applies to Apple and Microsoft, and raises a bit of a warning flag for Europeans. These are the masters of marketing. I don't know who is in charge of their sites, but it's clear that the marketing people have made quite sure that they serve the needs of customers above everyone else.

Eight of the 10 top ranking companies in our serving customers metric are American – that's up from six out of 10 in 2007. Right at the top are **HP, Wells Fargo, Microsoft and Apple** – all American.

Organisational change

So, in very broad terms, we've got a picture where the Americans need to think about the broader comms issues and the Europeans need to get slicker at the customer-facing side. The Asians, meanwhile, need to get out of the rut that a lot of European companies used to be in – that the corporate site is for investors, and that's that.

Obviously the answer is for very senior general management to get involved and make sure everyone works together. But I'm wondering if they could go further than that, and start to use the website as a management tool.

Maybe senior managers, or the bright young things who advise them, could take the idea of web phrenology and actually use it to sort out organisational problems, and maybe even make big changes.

For example, this thing about marketing and comms. The division is quite clear in companies, but maybe it shouldn't be. You only have one main web address and you want people to go there whether they're customers, investors, journalists, environmentalists or whoever. Maybe they are all of these wrapped into one person.

Social media management

The place where I see this artificial division is particularly acute is in social media, which is something we've been following at least as closely as the website itself.

Quite a few companies, mainly in the US, have social media managers who appear to be part of the marketing team and not linked to the web team or even the comms people. That's why Chris Barger, social media manager for **GM**, got back to the office to discover the chief executive had been sacked. His first tweet said he'd just got back from his son's birthday party and this was the first he knew about it.



Figure 21 GM's chief tweeter hadn't been kept in the loop – and he was quite open about that. Doesn't reflect well on the organisation

In other words, even though he was the chief voice of the company in the fastest-growing communications medium in the world, no one had thought to tell him that a huge story was about to break.

The European companies I talk to aren't making this mistake – they see social media and the web as part of the same effort, which it should be. But it does make me wonder if the division between marketing and comms is becoming increasingly meaningless, and it's the website and other online things that should make this clear.

At the mercy of IT

I'd like to give a couple of other examples of internal problems being highlighted by the web. One used to be common all over the place, but is mainly confined to the developing world.

This is where the senior managers have decided that, yes, the web is getting important, but have then handed it over to their IT people who like to use whizzy technology and have a few clever graphic designers.

That's how we get a site like China Shenhua.



Figure 22 China Shenhua's attractive new site makes unnecessary use of Flash

This is the site belonging to the second-largest coal miner in the world, has been totally overhauled in the past year and looks fine. Unfortunately, the left navigation bar is driven by Flash, which is pointless, bad for accessibility and means it doesn't work on an iPhone and various other devices.

Or look at **Petrobras**. This is a weird one. It's clearly not starved of money, because it keeps changing. It also looks rather good. But if you click into the site, you find that all the hard information is still on the old Brazilian site and is often difficult to find. Even though there have been changes at the front of the site, this problem has persisted for the past three years. It's clear no one is looking at it from above and saying 'hang on, let's get our priorities right'.

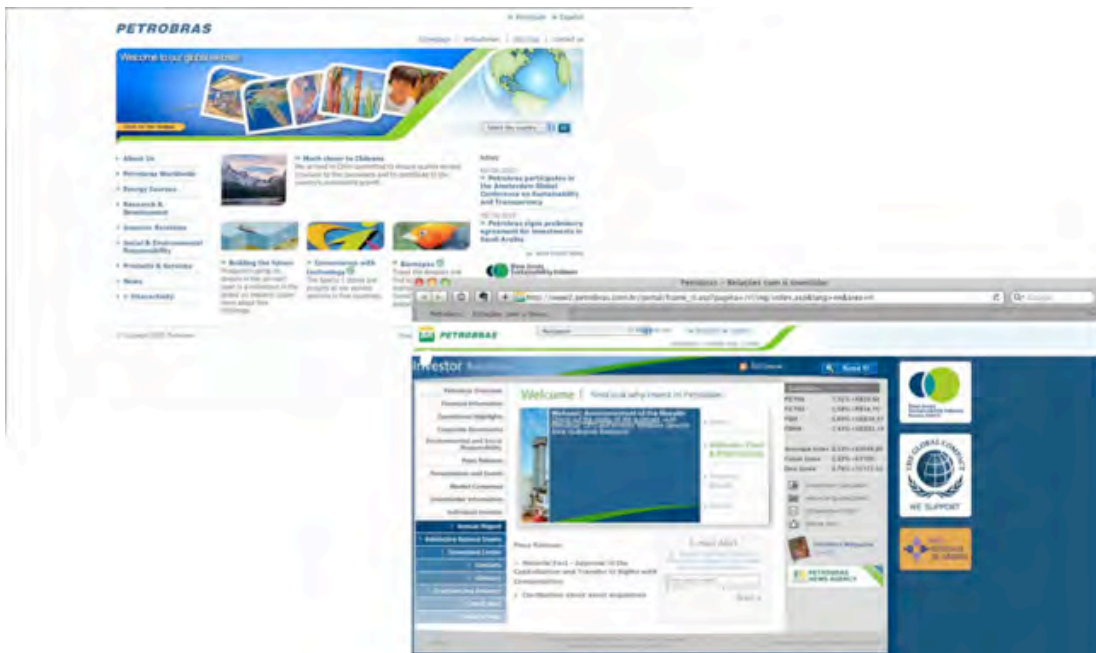


Figure 23 Petrobras home and IR pages – a strange discontinuity

Good news in the press room

The other thing we notice is to do with media sections.

I used to be a journalist, so I have a pretty good idea of what they want, and I also know that journalists tend to be technological luddites (the exceptions are technology journalists, which is yet another story). It's also sad but true that quite a few press officers are ex-journalists, so it's not surprising that in our Index the worst performing metric is the one about serving journalists.

It is amazing how bad some of the press sections are, with just a pile of press releases and no easy way of searching or browsing them.

But this is one place where there is some good news. Some press teams have started taking the web much more seriously, and have realised that they shouldn't just follow the old pattern of pumping out a press release and sending it to your contact list. Journalists are very unlikely to use only the media section, so why not put yourself into their heads.

Some companies have experimented with so-called social media newsrooms, but I think it's Twitter that is making a big difference. Twitter's habit of breaking stories, true or false, has meant that journalists are now having to follow Twitter, and that means press officers are having to use it too.

So we now have Shell sending out tweets pointing to different bits of the site – but it's not only press releases. Here is Shell telling its followers to look at a story – but it isn't a press release, it's actually a new page in the Environment and society section, which in turn links to a blog. The Twitter feed is coming from the Shell.com team, but I'm guessing that they are working closely with press. Anyway, it seems to suggest more cooperation between the departments. Hope so.

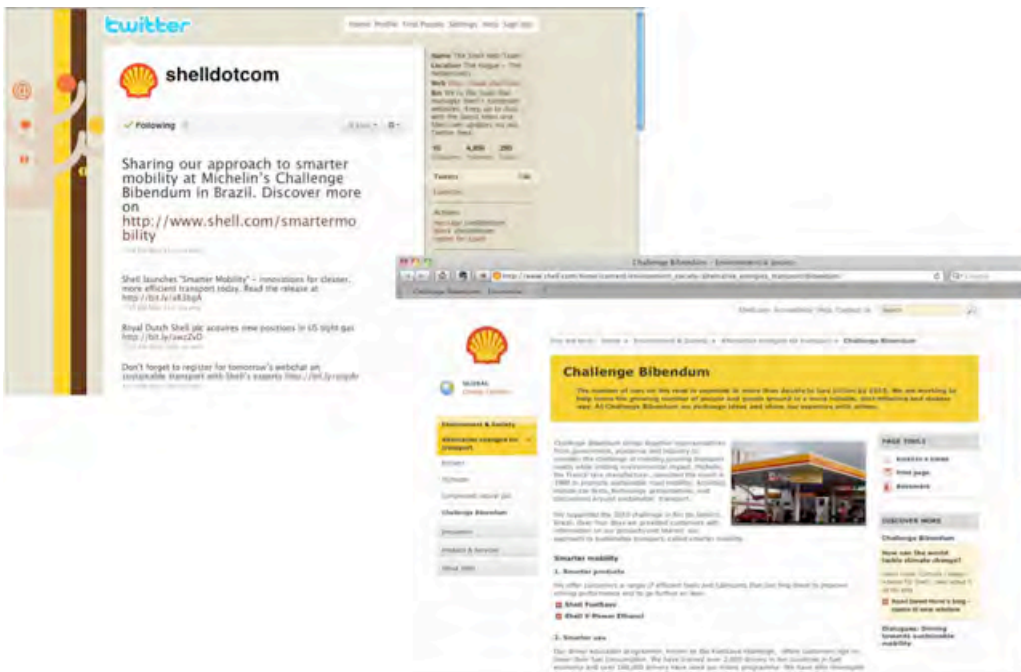


Figure 24 Shell Tweet pointing to a story in the Environment & society section, rather than to a press release

Home truths

Of course, the most obvious area of the site where internal politics should show up is the home page. But I think because of that it is also the page where most efforts have been made to suppress the politics.

In the old days we used to see a lot of pages like the one **Toyota** still has. This is where all different departments have been demanding their place in the sun, and they have all got it. But actually the trend is toward much more coherent pages.



Figure 25 Toyota's global home page has a mass of links to a disparate set of sites

What there hasn't been is any sort of consensus on what makes a good home page. But the big news since the Index started is what I call the **Siemens effect**.

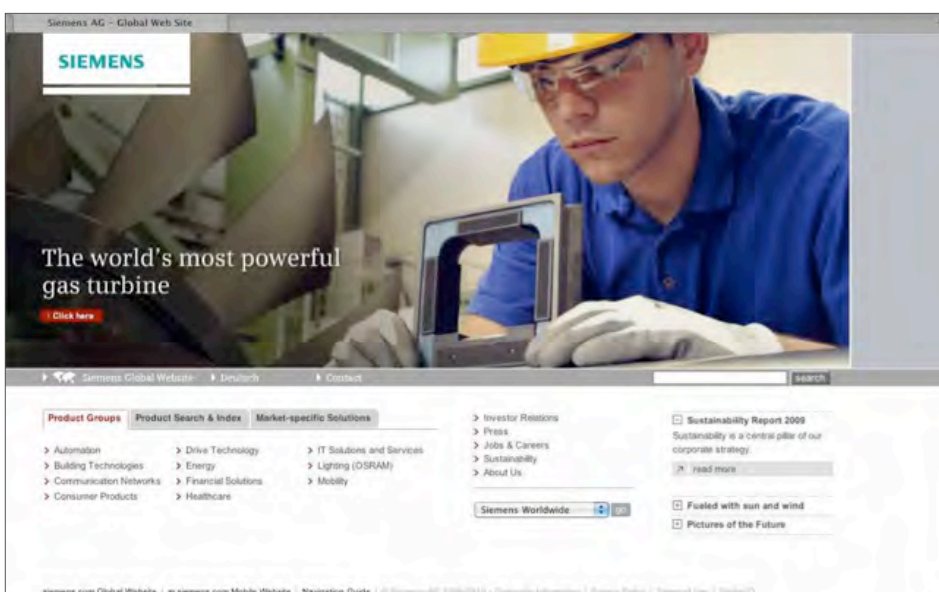


Figure 26 Siemens home page has had a huge impact

The high impact multimedia home page is definitely in fashion and has had an effect even on sites that were strong before. Look at how **GE's** page has changed.



Figure 27 GE's home page in 2007 and current - showing how the 'big image' fashion has affected it

There must be an element of fashion in this, and that's fine. We'll have to see what comes along next. But there is a more solid story behind the Siemens-style page, which I don't think will go away. It's that it's encouraged the use of story telling and, more generally, the idea that a website is a publication and shouldn't be boring. This is a definite theme, and it's a sign that companies are really taking the web seriously and are appointing full-time editors. Of course, that only happens when senior people are prepared to give the go ahead and sign off the budgets. So, once again, it's back to people.

A moment of change

I want to finish by coming right up to date – more up to date than the last FT Index, because I think something is going on that could have a lasting impact on the psyche of senior managers.

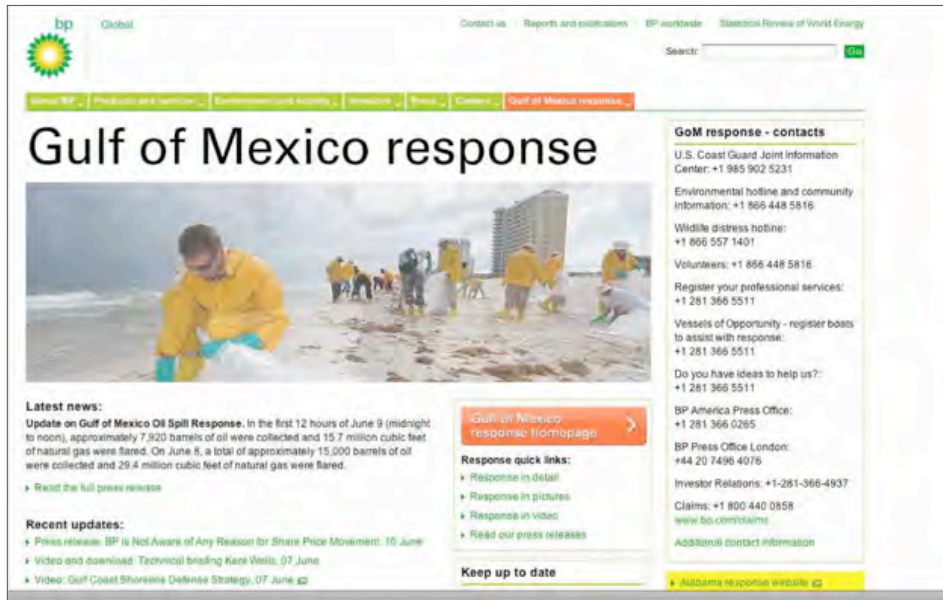


Figure 28 BP's home page, June 2010

In the past seven weeks, **BP** has not only been at the centre of a tragedy, and has become the most unpopular company in America, it has also transformed the way the web has been used. If any of you were at last year's conference in Barcelona, you will remember the keynote speech was given by Andrew Gowers, the former editor of the FT. He was about to go off and become head of media at BP; I haven't talked to him for a couple of months, but I think it's fair to guess he'd rather be here at the moment.

BP realised a good while ago, in about 2002, that the web was going to be a vital medium, and put in place an amazingly robust structure and set of process that has meant its web estate has gone on getting better without a relaunch.

It always saw that the web would be critical for crisis communications and when its Texas City Refinery blew up in 2005, it had a 'dark site' ready, which sprang to life within hours and aimed mainly to keep locals informed.

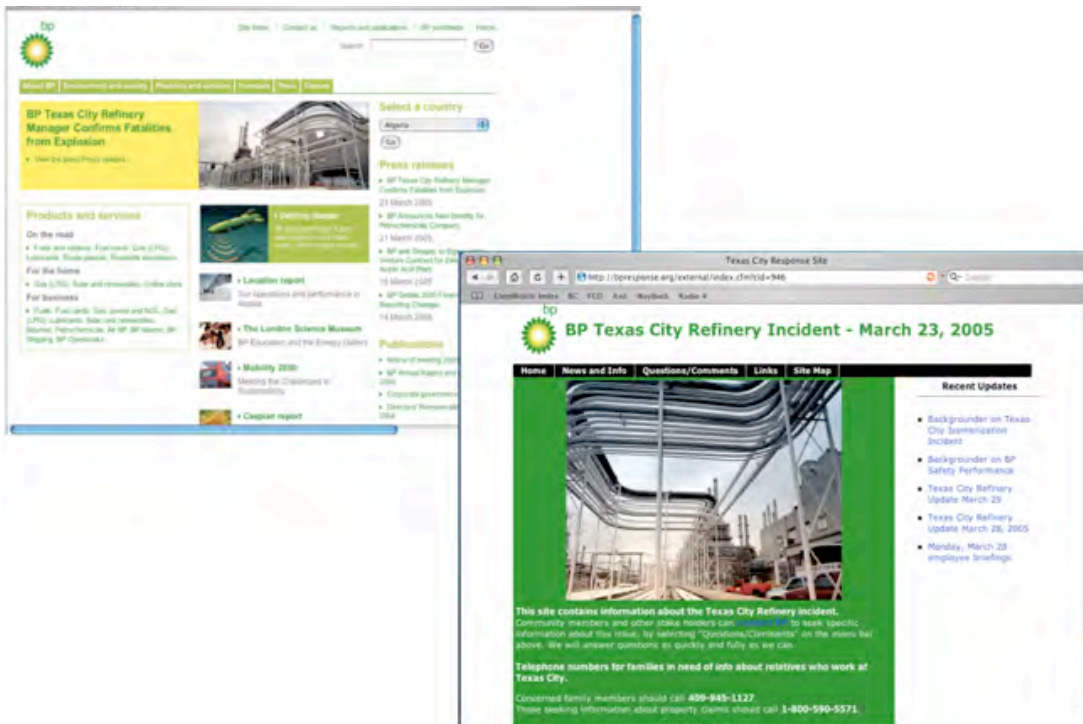


Figure 29 BP.com and the 'dark' site launched to handle its Texas City disaster in 2005

It used it again for various hurricanes and other big problems.

But the oil spill response is quite different. BP started by putting a prominent banner on its home page, and linked to the dark site, which has been brought to life at deepwaterresponse.com.

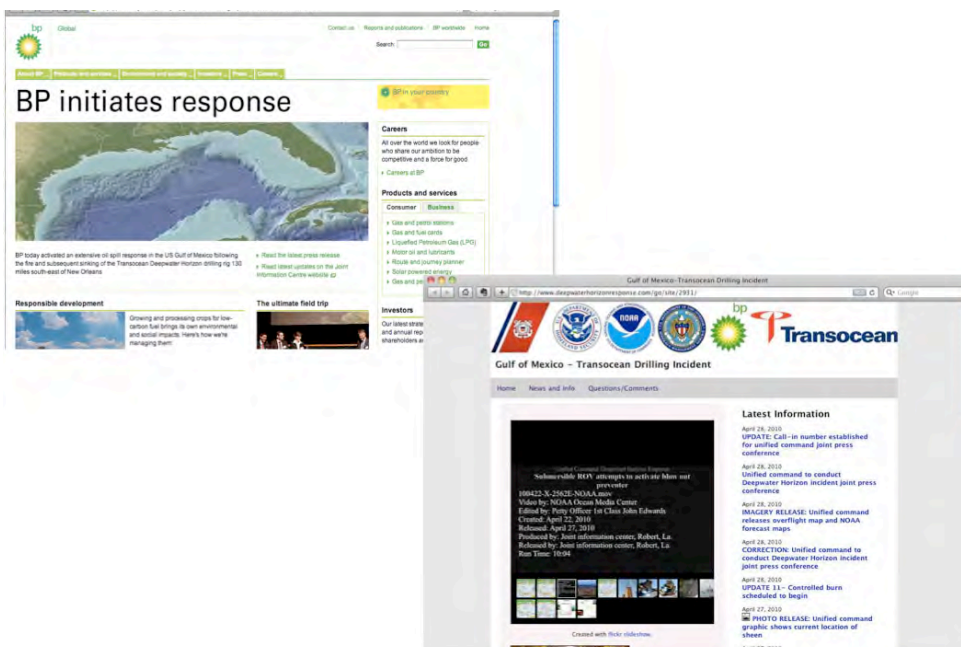


Figure 30 Shortly after the oil spill, BP was relying heavily on the dark site, reborn as deepwaterhorizon.com

But since then it has cleared its entire home page of anything else, and pulled the attention to itself – which I see as a parallel to concentrating media attention on the CEO, Tony Hayward. The site now does not have any prominent links to the Deep Water Response site.

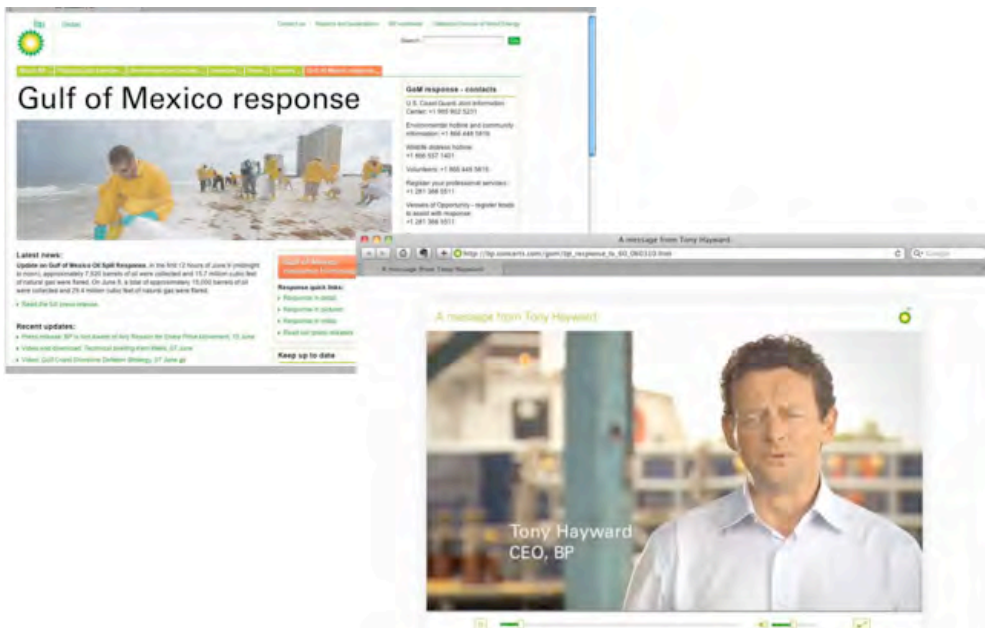


Figure 31 It then shifted attention to itself, with prominent CEO videos and no visible links to the dark site. Note how all other content has been cleared from the home page

At the same time, it's interesting to see how BP is using social media as part of the mix. Again, there have been subtle changes, with initial links to the Deep Water Response site being replaced by links to BP America's social media.



Figure 32 BP's social media activity, June 2010 This is now being highlighted; in the early days of the crisis Deepwaterhorizon.com's social media was more prominent

Lessons from BP

I think there are three really interesting things we can take from this, if we take the tragedy of it as read. I'm going to come back to these as three of my themes.

First, BP has seen the website as absolutely critical to its communication. If it got it before, it will super get it now. Its top management has realised that this is the place it expects people to go. The detail on the site is amazing, and when you add in the Deep Water site, which it also runs, and the associated Facebook, Twitter and YouTube efforts, the resources it is putting into online are quite scary.

This goes beyond crisis communication – it's an acknowledgment or what we all know, that increasingly the web is the first place to go whenever we want to know about anyone, anything, any company. We may not go to bp.com, but we will go to Google, where, if the company has done its job right, we should soon find ourselves steered towards it.

Second, it's phrenology again. I've been able to read quite a lot about what's going on at BP simply by looking at its website – you could call this running phrenology. The way it started off with the rather anonymous Deep Water site, then switched to direct all attention at itself, was clearly a strategy shift, presumably aimed at countering people who were saying it was trying to shift the blame to other people – which, if you remember, it did.

Third, the integration of social media with the website confirms what I think ought to be quite obvious – that they are part and parcel of the same communication effort, and it's silly to divide them into things like web 1.0 and web 2.0.

The online communications matrix

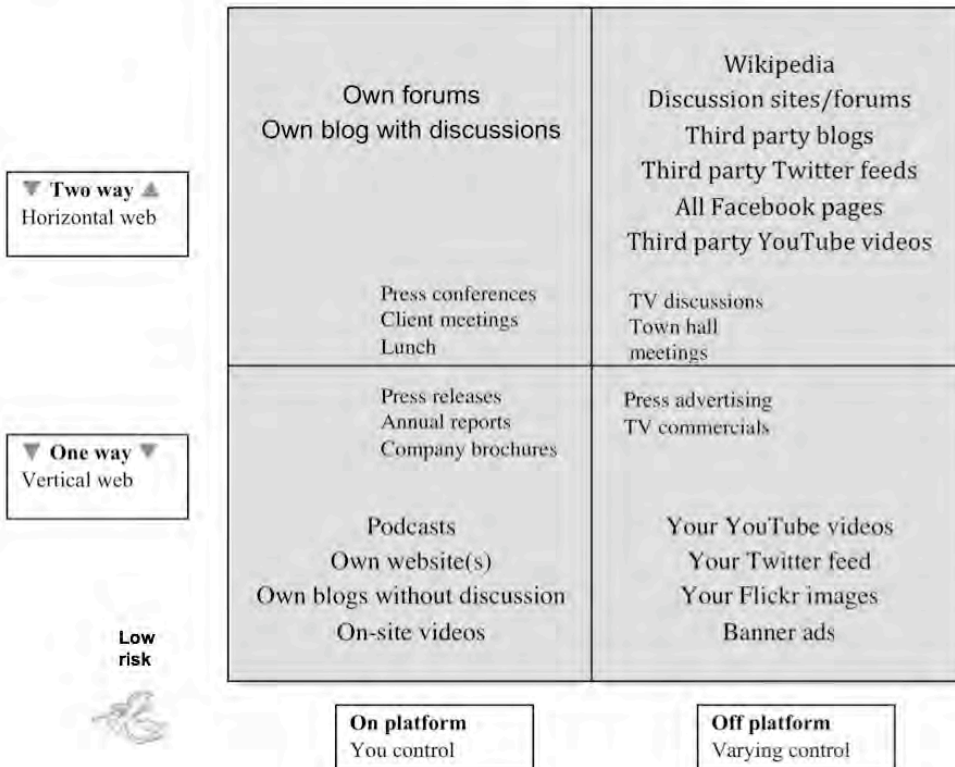
I'd like to leave you with an updated version of the matrix I devised a couple of years ago, which I've tweaked a bit. I haven't got time to explain this but you'll see that the website is just one of the many tools you have.

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'Web 2010'



High risk



One thing I will point out is that the top right square is the scary one. This is where you have no control over what's being said, and other people can say what they like. Yes, it's Facebook, and if you want to know how scary that can be listen to Nestlé. That story is all about people.

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