

MediaCodex d.o.o.
10 Buconjićeva
10000 Zagreb
Croatia

www.mediacodex.com

When Being “Correct” Isn’t Best

Wahyd Vannoni considers missed opportunities and common misperceptions in communications skills.

Imagine the following situation: you are the CEO of a large company and have just finished giving a presentation to a diverse audience. Imagine further, that the event will be rebroadcast on several television shows across the world.

The moderator opens-up the floor for questions. You think you are doing pretty well; no nasty questions, nothing unexpected.

Then somebody asks: “How many employees does your company have?”

You answer:

“9,472.”

Looking back at the event, you congratulate yourself on a job well done. You handled things well and even managed to recall exact statistics about your company.

What our imaginary CEO does not realise, is that his answer, though correct from an accounting standpoint, was not the optimal one. The best answer would have been one that helped position the company in the best light and that reinforced the messages from the presentation just given. It would have been ideal also that those messages were in line with the company’s communications strategy.

For this to happen however, he needed to properly prepare. He needed to have a communications strategy which reinforced his business strategy. This strategy would coordinate not only the presentation but also for follow on communications – question and answer, follow-up calls from the press, and even the casual business conversation. The communications strategy would also indicate how these elements should be coordinated to give maximum impact.

So while we can say that the answer given by our CEO was “correct” it was also, at the very least, a missed opportunity. The answer does not fit any key message and does not improve any business strategy because it is a standalone data-

point. There is nothing else that the journalists or investors can use to decide whether or not 9 472 employees is good or bad news for the company.

What would a more appropriate answer sound like? Assume that after a thorough preparation, the CEO and his advisers concluded that one key message was that the company is healthy and growing. Then, the answer to

“How many employees do you have?”

could be managed more effectively with:

“Last year we were 8,900, this year we’ve grown to 9,472 and in the coming year we plan to add an additional 5%.”

This answer paints a picture of growing company, and takes full advantage of the opportunity provided by the question.

Most presentors and speaker assume that because they know their subject matter intimately, they will be good speakers.

This is not the case. You need to craft a communications strategy, not just a presentation, before speaking at a conference. You need to know how to leverage the event in order to make the most of the opportunity. Then and only then, will you know your key points and how to answer any question in an optimal way.

Wahyd Vannoni is the Managing Director of MediaCodex d.o.o., a corporate communications advisory firm. MediaCodex services range from communication strategy development and media training to public speaking coaching and review. MediaCodex clients are advised in effective ways to leverage every business communications opportunity for competitive advantage including: conferences, public speaking, a press interview or internal corporate dialogue.



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10 Buconjićeva
10000 Zagreb
Croatia

www.mediacodex.com

Email Professional:
wahyd.vannoni@mediacodex.com

Office Croatia +385 1 37 65357
Office Croatia +385 1 37 65360
Fax Croatia +385 1 37 65365

Mobile Croatia +385 (0)91 797 4332
Mobile Italy +39 338 387 5509