

LESSONS ON VALUE CREATION FROM AHOLD DELHAIZE AND COCA-COLA EUROPACIFIC PARTNERS

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Measuring the impact of communication is central to business strategy. How do communication leaders pinpoint where their efforts deliver the greatest return, set meaningful objectives, and prove their contribution to the business? And in what ways does AI support or complicate the measurement of success? Elvira Bos (Ahold Delhaize) and Shanna Wendt (Coca-Cola Europacific Partners) share their experiences in turning strategy, data, and technology into demonstrable business impact.

WHAT SUCCESS IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION REALLY MEANS TODAY

Success in corporate communication is no longer defined by outputs alone – it is about creating the conditions for impact. For Elvira Bos and Shanna Wendt, that shift has fundamentally changed how they approach their roles. “The expectations from stakeholders have shifted significantly in recent years,” Bos notes. She has been leading corporate communication at Ahold Delhaize, one of the world’s largest food retail groups, for more than five years. “Understanding different viewpoints and being able to place yourself in someone else’s shoes is crucial to help the company navigate its license to operate with clarity.”

For Bos, success rests on three core elements:

- **Awareness** means deeply understanding the world around the company, its sector, financial context, operational pressures, and the broader societal forces shaping stakeholder expectations.
- **Preparedness** is about building credibility, strong positioning, and trust before a crisis hits; about “fixing the roof while the sun is shining;” and using scenario planning and proactive engagement to ensure informed decision-making.
- **Relationships** involve identifying opinion leaders inside and outside the organization, balancing perspectives, and fostering bottom-up internal communications within

the company to complement external engagement.

Wendt frames success as creating conditions for growth. She leads global communications at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CCEP), one of the world's leading consumer goods companies. "We achieve this by being audience-centric, balancing both human and brand focus, and ensuring digital excellence underpins everything we do," she explains. Every interaction, intentional or not, is a moment of communication. This shift from a business-centric view to an audience-driven perspective changes how success is measured and what communications priorities look like.

Measurement brings this audience-driven perspective to life, for example in how CCEP understands and positions itself as a business. "We've always seen ourselves as an inherently local business with a global brand, with manufacturing sites and employees across our markets. But we took for granted that this was widely understood", Wendt says. Research and measurement told a different story. "It showed us that this wasn't clear to our audiences," she explains. As a result, the company has shifted both its communications and resources to better reflect its local presence across markets such as Germany, France, and the UK – demonstrating how measurement and research can directly influence positioning and strategic focus.

Earning a seat and being heard early enough

Communications has a stronger position in organizations than ever before, but early involvement remains a challenge. Bos reflects, "We are well positioned and supported by our CEO, to whom we report directly, yet, and I'm sure more professionals will recognize this, we're not

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when it works well.*

always involved as early as we would like. Sometimes, we're brought in when something is already underway, whereas ideally, we'd have been part of the discussion weeks or even months earlier. One important contribution our function can have," she notes, "is helping the organization think more 'reputationally' when making decisions. Reputation is often seen as something owned by communications, but in reality, it's shaped by countless interactions and decisions across the business, from customer experiences to hiring

processes. That's why it's so important for communications to be involved early, helping to shape key business decisions rather than being asked to 'fix' issues after the fact."

To make impact visible and bring the outside world in, her team created a two-page quarterly overview for the executive committee. It summarizes results, upcoming opportunities, and emerging retail and societal trends. Making communications more visible and valued is something she and her team are continuously working on: "I think we'll probably never reach a phase where we feel like, 'Okay, now they fully see the scope of what we're doing.' But I also look at it the other way around. I do not have full visibility on everything they do, and I trust them on it. That's just how companies work."

Wendt highlights that those visible moments – campaigns, leadership updates, or business performance announcements – represent only a fraction of the work.

Ahold Delhaize is one of the world's largest food retail groups, serving over 77 million customers



each week across Europe, the United States and Indonesia. Its family of 17 local brands – including Albert Heijn, Food Lion, Stop & Shop, Delhaize and bol – operates more than 9,500 stores and employs 384,000 associates. Headquartered in Zaandam, the Netherlands, Ahold Delhaize is listed on Euronext Amsterdam and Brussels (ticker: AD).

Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CCEP) is one of the world's leading consumer goods companies. It produces, moves, and sells some



of the world's most loved brands, serving nearly 600 million consumers and supporting over four million customers across 31 countries. CCEP combines the strength and scale of a multinational business with deep local knowledge of the markets, customers, and communities it serves. The company is listed on Euronext Amsterdam, NASDAQ, the London Stock Exchange, and the Spanish Stock Exchanges, and is a constituent of both the NASDAQ 100 and FTSE 100 indices.

Much of communications' contribution is quiet but essential. "Is our value always fully understood across the organization? Honestly, no. Our board and executive leadership recognize it, which is vital, but much of what we do is invisible when it works well. The great tragedy for our profession sometimes is that when we do our job really well, it looks simple, almost invisible."

ALIGNING STRATEGY WITH IMPACT

Successful corporate communication relies on ensuring that every initiative, project, and campaign creates value, aligns with the company strategy, and adapts to changing circumstances. For Bos and Wendt, this means balancing long-term strategic priorities with the flexibility to respond to emerging issues, while keeping audiences and business outcomes front and center. "One of the things I really love about our setup is that communications is fully integrated

Communication goals are defined alongside commercial objectives – never as an afterthought.

into the business planning process," Wendt explains. "At the same time that we define our commercial objectives, we are setting goals for communications. It's never an afterthought and I think that's really key." Her team follows an annual planning cycle, with mini sprints throughout the year to check progress and make adjustments. What success looks like for each initiative is defined upfront and, depending on scale and scope, it is either measured and evaluated after completion or interim assessments are conducted to make adjustments along the way.

Bos adds that her team's work is guided by a multi-year strategy aligned with the overall company strategy, with a four-year horizon and a yearly planning cycle. "It defines where we can create the most value, both proactively and defensively." Proactively, her team uses a topical calendar to ensure balanced storytelling across business-linked themes such as sustainability, innovation, and AI. Defensively, real-time monitoring, reputation tracking, and structured stakeholder engagement allow them to respond effectively to emerging issues, ensuring that the strategy remains relevant and actionable throughout the year. The OGSM framework (objectives, goals, strategies, measures) helps to stay

focused on where the most value beyond core responsibilities can be added, such as corporate reporting, financial communication, and business announcements.

Beyond the numbers

Bos emphasizes: "Every project starts with the goal in mind, but flexibility is critical. KPIs shouldn't be followed at any cost." Measurement, they both underline, is a journey with metrics ranging from broader business indicators with indirect influence to areas such as channel performance and campaign effectiveness, where influence can be more directly managed. The ultimate goal is linking those indicators to business outcomes: "We would like to show how reputation affects purchase intent and, ultimately, sales," Wendt adds, "but measurement can't be about quantity over quality. Tracking coverage or follower numbers alone doesn't tell the full story. And today, we're surrounded by data. The real challenge is not access, but making that data meaningful."

Their approach to measurement is underpinned by fundamental principles such as credibility, transparency, and relevance, with frameworks like AMEC's Barcelona Principles serving as a foundation. "Measurement cannot feel like a 'dark art' or some kind of magic. If we want to use measurement meaningfully within organizations, people need to understand where the data comes from,

KPIs shouldn't be followed at any cost.

what exactly is being measured, and how to interpret it." For Wendt, that starts with a simple question: are we asking the right questions? "You can have all the data in the world, but if you're not framing the right questions, you won't get clear or useful answers. If we stay disciplined in applying these principles and thoughtful in how we use data, we can ensure that our measurement is both robust and genuinely valuable for decision-making."

WHAT HAMBURGERS TEACH US ABOUT AI-DRIVEN PRACTICE

Today, conversations about corporate communication almost always touch on AI. "Sometimes I feel like it's a game

of whether you can have any conversation without ending up discussing AI. Chances are, no,” Wendt admits. She notes that AI plays a growing role not just across communications in general, but also in measurement and evaluation. “I look at it in two ways,” she explains. “First, we use it to make measuring the impact and effectiveness of communications easier. Second, it helps us interpret the insights we gather. Sometimes we feel awash in data, and AI lets us ask: What does this mean, and what should we do next?”

Yet context, judgment, and relationships remain irreplaceable. “Every AI application has a human in the loop,” Wendt emphasizes. A recent process mapping identified which tasks are purely human, which are tech-driven, and which are hybrid, allowing the team to deploy AI effectively while keeping control and accuracy.

Bos adds, “We use AI for media monitoring, social listening, stakeholder mapping, summarizing information, and structuring reports provided by external vendors. I personally use a company-licensed LLM daily. It simplifies my work, sharpens my writing, and helps me test ideas. Experimentation is crucial to see where AI adds real value, not just

improving what we already do, but enabling what we couldn’t do before.” She stresses that AI cannot replace human judgment, intuition, or moment-to-moment perception. To illustrate, Bos shares her “hamburger method”: “The foundation – the lower bun – is your strategy, context, and data. AI adds the patty: insights, refinements, and alternative perspectives. The top bun is human judgment: reviewing, interpreting, and applying insights. Humans and AI together reduce risks, like bias or misinterpretation, while maximizing the value AI can provide.”

Overall, Wendt’s key recommendation is to have a thorough understanding of the commercial aspects of one’s own business or organization. “This has to guide what you measure and how you measure it,” she stresses. “You could bring all sorts of data to the CEO, but your impact will be far greater if you can explain why each metric matters. Not for reputation’s sake alone, but because of the tangible impact it has on the business. I can’t stress this enough: Understanding the business context is essential for meaningful measurement and communication.”

CONTRIBUTORS



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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