

## Connecting With the World of PR

Global communications leaders, including John Saunders, regional director for Fleishman-Hillard Ireland, participated in a virtual forum to talk about some of the more pressing issues facing the PR industry today. Keith O'Brien, editor-in-chief for *PRWeek*, moderated the discussion, which included such topics as the global perception of U.S.-based companies and the evolving role of new media within the industry.

### ***PRWeek: Can you give us some insights into the economic picture for your region/country right now, in terms of PR business?***

**Erin Atan (Lewis PR, Singapore):** Recent years have seen the steady stream of companies entering Asia, driving the demand for PR. These companies are finally making the commitment to invest in building their brand in the region, shifting focus on corporate programs, as opposed to just focusing on air cover for products and services. With this, PR in Asia is not only seeing a boom, but is also changing at a frenetic pace.

**Karen Ovseyevitz (Martec Porter Novelli, Mexico):** The PR business in Mexico has grown in double-digit numbers in the last five years. There are many players in the market, representing international and regional agencies – and also local agencies. A couple of years ago, many one-man-shop agencies emerged in the Mexican market but not all of them have managed to stay open. Most of them were formed by ex-journalists.

**Julia Hood (PRWeek):** Karen - that is very interesting about the solo practitioners. Why do you think they came up, and why are many not thriving now?

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** The solo practitioners emerged in the market mainly because of two reasons: one is a crisis that some published media went through a couple of years ago, having to go through important downsizing and leaving many journalists without a job, and some of them opened their own "PR agencies." Another reason is that some marketing executives in dot-com and IT companies lost their jobs, and they founded their marketing services and PR shops from home. Working from home reduces the overhead cost of a PR agency, so they have survived in the market because they offer services at prices that no professional, qualified, and robust PR agency would be able to offer. This resulted in them winning clients, but is not a sustainable model in the future because they cannot provide the same level and quality of services than a full-service agency.

**Prema Sagar (Genesis Burson-Marsteller, India):** The Indian economy has grown at a remarkable 8.4%, improving on the advance estimate of 8.1% and last year's figure of 7.5%. With the economy booming, foreign direct investment is also rising. Business confidence in India is on a high. This is resulting in growth of the nascent PR industry in India. There are no figures yet to substantiate percentage of growth.

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**John Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard, Ireland):** From a European perspective, one could argue that recent political developments in Germany, France, and Italy all point to an economy that can hardly be described as booming. However, I have very little time for those who point to a stagnant European economy as a reason for our industry not doing well. The fact is, for much of Europe, PR is still at a fledgling stage and, in some places its value is not even understood. The overall business is probably worth somewhere in the region of \$1.5 billion annually, but I have little doubt that hundreds of millions in dollars are still being left on the table. At Fleishman-Hillard, we're trying to hire more top-notch people so we can take advantage of the many opportunities that exist. As long as we're providing a level of expertise, which brings value to clients, then, barring a complete meltdown, our industry ought to be recession-proof for many years to come.

**Anders Kempe (MS&L, Sweden):** As everyone knows, the European economy has been relatively weak for the past few years, but there are still obvious exceptions like Scandinavia, where I am based. Here the economy has been on the upswing, which results in strong growth for the PR industry as a whole. This has strengthened the existing PR agencies, but it has also paved the way for startups of new, specialized agencies. There is great potential for our industry in Europe. In contrast to the U.S., the European industry has not yet reached full maturity, so there is a lot of room for growth. At the same time, we've noticed in the past few years that companies are shifting their focus from advertising to PR. This reflects the fact that many companies are increasingly uncertain about the actual value of paid media, and they realize the importance of managing and maintaining relationships on different fronts.

**Rolf Olsen (Weber Shandwick, Switzerland):** We are enjoying very strong growth across the continent. The growth comes from both local clients and continued positive developments with our international clients. I am particularly excited about the prospects for the Central and Eastern European region. We are opening several new offices both in this region, and in the Nordic countries. As Anders pointed out, the Nordic PR market is exciting. We did open in Sweden already, and so far I am very pleased with the developments. One big change for us is that all the expansion and growth is organic, aligned with client needs and also more integrated solutions across many communications disciplines.

***PRWeek: Are there particular industries or sectors that have rebounded in the past year, or others that have declined?***

**Scott Kronick (Ogilvy PR, China):** Healthcare has been the sector that has lagged in China in our industry. [But] there have been a number of complicating factors the industry has faced in China that I believe will fuel the growth of greater health communications in the years to come. There is real opportunity for environmental communications, but this will take a lot of effort among companies that are genuinely environmentally friendly.

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** The IT/Telecom and healthcare sectors have shown significant growth in their PR investment in the last couple of years. The consumer and corporate sectors have also shown growth, but not as aggressive. There is no particular segment that is declining although a lot of lobbying work is being done by specialized lobbying agencies more than by traditional PR agencies.

**David Hargreaves (Bite Communications, UK):** The tech sector is no doubt stronger now than it was a couple of years ago. This growth is likely to be further fueled by the emergence of Web 2.0 companies, which are threatening to create the next tech bubble. Just today, a new social networking site, Bebo, overtook MySpace as the most visited site in the UK. Our challenge is twofold: helping established companies exploit the phenomenal PR opportunities that exist through the rise of social networks and working with the 2.0 companies to ensure they don't go the same way as those in the dot-com boom.

**Atan (Lewis):** It is similar here in Asia. The IT/telecom sector is certainly leading the growth, and healthcare comes in a close second. In addition, I am seeing tremendous demand for corporate- and issues-crisis management type of work, propelled on the back of the growing concern about Avian flu.

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** IT, ITES, and telecom, as you can imagine, is booming in India. But so are services, industry, consumer, and entertainment. The big potential in India is healthcare and life sciences, infrastructure, and utilities and public affairs.

**Ron Mincheff (Edelman, Brazil):** While most Brazilian industries have maintained previous PR investments, IT, telecom, healthcare, and professional marketing services have seen notable gains. We hope the trend continues.

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** We see everyday more companies in the IT sector looking to standardize programs and agencies at a global level.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** We've seen a big growth in travel and tourism in Europe. Public affairs has been very strong for us, too.

**Kempe (MS&L):** In response to the increasing European regionalization and deregulation, many heavily regulated industries such as banking, energy, telecoms, and healthcare have developed a great need for PR-related services. This is especially obvious from a Scandinavian perspective, considering that deregulation has come relatively far in these countries.

***PRWeek: In the past few years, as the PR industry has become increasingly important, we have noticed a clearer separation of strategic communication and PR.***

**Rolf Olsen (Weber Shandwick, Switzerland):** Healthcare and tech show the most opportunities. Generally, we see more international opportunities, and, increasingly, we lead major multi-country projects from the continent, not only from our flagship UK office.

**Costerton (H&K):** I agree with the comments on technology and pharma, both of which are strong. Additionally we are seeing very strong demand in internal communications, crisis comms, and online programs, particularly those engaging consumers. Sports is booming this year (but I am writing on the eve of the World Cup)...

***PRWeek: What is the talent pool like in your region for professional staff? Are you hiring locally or bringing in staff from other regions?***

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** Talent is one of our major areas of focus in the agency. We understand the importance of talent and of being able to attract and retain the right talent. In Mexico, it is very difficult to find people with experience because it is a fairly young market. Our philosophy is to hire college graduates in different areas of specialty (marketing, communications, and journalism) and train them in public relations. Our hiring is mainly local, but we believe a lot in the value of bringing people from other regions for exchange programs. We look for opportunities to grow the people inside the agency by investing in their training and development.

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** Talent in public relations globally seems to be a very big issue. The same in Asia and India, too. Although India's talent pool is less precarious than other regions, the shortage of good talent is catching up here, too. Salaries are going through the roof. We hire post-graduates from various fields and run our own one-year learning program within our own learning center. This center also provides ongoing programs for our organization of 200+ people. We plan to integrate people from different parts of the world through the Burson-Marsteller career-building and exchange programs.

**Mincheff (Edelman):** Staffing decisions are mainly taken based on client needs. For experienced PR professionals, the Brazilian market is ripe with qualified candidates that are positive for the industry. For more execution-based work, we have a host of world-class PR universities that are graduating very talented individuals, who we work diligently with on training issues. While we do not usually bring expats in to handle local communications, we currently have a German and American executive working on specific client charters.

**Hargreaves (Bite):** I doubt a single UK agency would argue if you said one of the biggest challenges is attracting and retaining the best talent. There are many strategies, which we and other agencies are using successfully. They revolve around attracting smart graduates and developing our own talent, attracting staff from overseas, and actively seeking talent from both industry and other specialists with broader marketing disciplines.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** Talent is a big issue, which everyone has outlined. We should, however, look to find the reasons why this is the case. Certainly, in Europe, a chronic problem is the huge level of over-servicing. This means that we lose a lot of people either through burnout or because we cannot pay our people the kind of money they see their friends getting in less demanding jobs. I've tried to highlight this issue at every chance in my role as president of the International Communications Consultancy Organisation.

We're an industry populated by so many very talented women, but I don't think we do a good enough job keeping them in the business.

**Atan (Lewis):** In general, the PR market in Asia is relatively new. Therefore, finding experienced talent can be quite difficult. In markets like Hong Kong and Singapore, where the PR industry is more mature than in other Asian markets, it is less of a challenge.

**Kempe (MS&L):** In response to the increasing European regionalization and deregulation, many heavily regulated industries such as banking, energy, telecoms, and healthcare have developed a great need for PR-related services. This is especially obvious from a Scandinavian perspective, considering that deregulation has come relatively far in these countries. Still, like my colleagues everywhere in the world, finding the right talent is difficult, and when you do find them, you need to dedicate time effort in retaining them. This can be quite a challenge in such a vibrant and high demand region. I tend to interview candidates for a career rather than a job, and therefore am inclined to wait for the right candidate. I need to be able to picture them still at Lewis five years later, doing well and being happy.

As a group, we invest heavily on our consultants' development and advocate global education. To date, this move has been proven successful in retaining staff, demonstrated by our lower than average attrition rate.

**Kempe (MS&L):** I agree with what has been said previously. Our industry will always need people with a broad range of experience to meet the clients' diverse needs. Therefore our strategy is to recruit top achievers directly from academic educations in marketing, communication studies, business, economics and politics. At JKL, we believe that building strong, well-rounded teams creates a wealth of perspectives, and ultimately makes us more competitive. Most of the recruiting for MS&L is done locally or regionally, but there is a growing cooperation between the offices as the company attracts more global customers, so recruitment must also become more international.

**Olsen (WS):** I might be influenced by my first 20 years on the client side, but I do believe agencies need to recruit more people with real senior client-side experience. And to serve international clients, we must have people with strong international experience.

Finding people who know both local and global is hard, and those that do have internal experience and good local connections are very well placed.

**Costerton (H&K):** A shortage of talent, particularly at senior levels, is probably the industry's biggest challenge, at least in the London market. Every agency head says the same thing: We are all frustrated that we are fishing in the same, small talent pool, which drives up salaries and recruitment costs. This is not a problem that will go away any time soon. The only solutions are to get creative on talent attraction, and I am keen to attract a much more diverse talent base to H&K from a wider range of backgrounds. In addition we invest heavily in our graduate program - it has consistently been one of our best sources of talent.

We are very lucky to be able to move talent around our global network, which allows us to access a wide range of specific skills although some markets inevitably cross over better than others. Finally, we all need to create motivational environments that allow us to retain our talent.

***PRWeek: How much of your office focuses on global clients? Is this becoming a greater proportion or smaller, and why?***

**OVseyevitz (Martec PN):** Our office in Mexico City works mostly with global clients, and we have important local clients. What I have seen is that international companies have a very clear understanding of PR, its reach, and its power, and know what they want. We have a big opportunity of "educating" the market in terms of PR. The

awareness of PR has grown in the last ten years and we foresee a lot of more local companies looking at PR programs as part of their marketing mix. I wonder how this is in other regions of the world?

**Kronick (Ogilvy):** Ogilvy PR in China has grown up predominantly with clients won on a local- market basis. However, since Marcia Silverman has taken over the leadership, our global client list has grown significantly, along with the status of China as a key market. Intel is a result of this. So is Lenovo, which was helped by the Ogilvy global relationship.

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** About 90 percent of our clients are global. Indian companies have yet to understand the need of a strategic approach to PR as opposed to column centimeters. Only a very few companies are now beginning to understand the need to look at PR in a more holistic manner. I am certain the change will take place sooner rather than later. Once they see the value of how PR can be used as an effective tool, then only will they succeed in developing the skill of communication to reach their domestic consumers/customers/clients. More importantly, they will need to communicate as they go global and that will be the acid test. Communication is no longer a choice.

**Mincheff (Edelman):** Edelman Brazil's client roster is an 80 to 20 percent mix of global multinational clients and leading Brazilian businesses. Many international clients want global PR firms and leading Brazilian groups want world-class PR consulting and execution. I would venture to say that we will have more expressive growth with Brazilian groups moving forward due to their need to penetrate global markets and grow outside of Brazil.

**Hargreaves (Bite):** Given Bite operates in the digital lifestyle and technology sectors, the vast majority of our clients are global companies. The trend is likely to continue towards globalization as the technology industry continues to consolidate as the smaller innovative companies get swallowed up by the global consolidators. Having said that, new innovative companies will continue to emerge that will require PR support prior to ultimately being acquired.

**Olsen (WS):** The share of international business is increasing across the board. New clients are coming in, and we are expanding those that we have to include more and more countries. We collaborate extensively across markets, but also with our sister agencies in IPG across the whole communications mix. The ideal in my view is a well-balanced mix of local and international clients; this equilibrium creates win-win for both the clients and the agency. The local clients gain from the best practice developed by international projects, and the international clients gain on our strong local roots enabled by local clients and projects.

***PRWeek: What are the most influential business publications in your region? Are there any blogs or other non-traditional media outlets that are important?***

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** The most influential national publications in India are [as follows]: For business papers, the *Economic Times*, *Business Standard*, and *Financial Express*. For business magazines, it's *Business World*, *Business Today*, and *Business India*. As for television channels, it's CNBC, NDTVProfit, CNN-IBN, Times Now, BBC, and CNN. And there are a large number of blogs on *Rediff.com*, *Indiatimes*, and others.

**Mincheff (Edelman):** Brazil's most influential business media include *Exame Magazine*, *Jornal Valor* and *Gazeta Mercantil* financial dailies. Blogs are becoming more expressive by writers for some of our general interest dailies, but we expect the trend to reach the business media in the very near term.

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** The most influential business media in Mexico are daily newspapers' business sections (*El Financiero*, *Reforma*, *El Economista*) and magazines like *Expansion*, *Alto Nivel*, and *Mundo Ejecutivo*. There are some influential radio programs generally conducted by columnists. So you see a lot of content integration between print and electronic media. Blogging is a trend that we see coming, but it is not very widely used, although some journalists are starting their own blogs.

**Atan (Lewis):** Singapore and Hong Kong have emerged as the location for regional bureaus for the majority of the regional and international titles. When we talk about business publications, the most region-wide respected titles are still the old favorites like the *Wall Street Journal – Asia* and *The Financial Times*. *BusinessWeek Asia* online remains the source of news for many decision-makers in the region, while CNBC Asia has one of the highest penetration / viewership in the region. There has been a proliferation of blogs in the region, but in some markets they tend to be more of the personal nature, rather than the corporate blogs that we see in the West. Podcasting is catching on. This year, Singapore's main local daily, *The Straits Times* and majority of the local radio stations launched their podcast. In the region, IDG launched CIO Live which covers Asia, China, Japan and Korea. I also see that Edelman has started its own podcast, what may be the first in Asia.

**Kempe (MS&L):** From an EU perspective, *The Financial Times* is still in its own class, but a number of European industry papers have also become important and reliable sources of information in the past few years.

Blogs have grown unbelievably in just the past year. While there are still relatively few companies that have blogs, it has become more common among journalists, politicians and private persons. In Scandinavia the blogs have gained legitimacy and acceptance in conventional media.

**Olsen (WS):** I agree with Anders on the FT, but I'd also like to put in a word for the *International Herald Tribune*. They connect very well with an influential audience and have become a great international paper with strong business and technology coverage. But most Europeans live in one country, and I think the leading national dailies are still the number one source of influence for the agenda setters in the various markets.

**Sally Costerton (Hill & Knowlton, UK):** *The Financial Times* has maintained its premium status over the years. It's still the title business clients most want to be in. That said, blogs are developing an interesting role. A number of clients are asking us to review key bloggers and what they're saying in the same way as we have always done for key journalists. In the UK, [BBC Radio's] Today is still very influential. It still seems to be the C-suite's alarm clock. Direct-to-desktop RSS feeds are also growing as people become more used to customizing their media intake.

***PRWeek: Do you feel like you are part of a global agency? What does that really mean to you and your staff?***

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** Genesis has been affiliated with Burson-Marsteller for five years. Recently we were acquired by Burson-Marsteller and our entire staff is happy to be part of a global organization that we believe will continue to provide global opportunities in terms of clients and people.

**Mincheff (Edelman):** We surely feel we are part of a global network. We regularly participate in company training sessions. We support global CSR commitments the firm is engaged with, and we frequently liaise with colleagues from Latin America, the U.S., Asia, and Europe. Being part of a global network means you have quick access to leading specialists in every area and that you aren't alone. You are 2,000-people strong every day.

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** As a local agency that was acquired by Porter Novelli eight years ago we do feel entirely part of the global company. The great thing about Porter Novelli is that you are able to live by the values of the global organization without putting at risk your own culture. I feel I work in a very interdependent organization where people have the chance to learn and share knowledge with people around the globe. I know that the opportunity to be part of this global company gives employees much more perspective and chances to grow in their careers.

**Hargreaves (Bite):** Having run independent agencies for ten years prior to Bite, I underestimated the benefits of being part of a larger company with multiple offices. It isn't about the access to global clients, but more about the ability to learn and develop from other individuals within the network. This is particularly true when it comes to specialist PR services and for specific sector expertise. It is this sharing of experiences and thirst for knowledge that is a key driver of the culture and opportunities within larger agencies.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** John Graham set out over 20 years ago to transform Fleishman-Hillard into a truly global agency. As the man who has led our firm for 40 remarkable years, I think he can justifiably claim he has succeeded in this ambition. I'm writing this from the Dallas airport on my way to Frankfurt and then to Brussels. I've just been at a meeting where we were discussing issues, challenges and opportunities for Fleishman-Hillard in Asia, Europe, the U.S. of course, Africa - where we have a brilliant office that recently took the big award at the SABREs - and just about everywhere else in the world. Coming as I do from a small country like Ireland, I and my colleagues there set about teaming up with a firm which would educate us on global trends, give us access to thought leaders and having been part of this now for 19 years, I think I can say I've found my true home. Paul Johnson, who heads up our global practice groups and has other major responsibilities for our firm, is coming with me on this trip. It's just great to be able to call upon his kind of expertise for the meetings we're having in Brussels. The world has become a very small place. Just look at what is happening in India. While Prema Sagar is a competitor of ours, I have huge admiration for what she is doing both with her own firm and for our industry.

**Atan (Lewis):** In ten years, LEWIS has grown primarily because of our global outlook. As David Hargreaves says, being part of a global operation is more than just access to global clients. It has given our staff real opportunities to grow and be exposed to a world that operates in blurred geographic boundaries. LEWIS believes in this so much,

that 60% of our consultants are not in their country of origin. Our clients benefit from the international outlook and knowledge that the consultants bring to the table.

**Kempe (MS&L):** Considering that our industry is growing and that we, as a group, are attracting more global clients, it is extremely important that we are seen as one company when it comes to our culture, competence, and offerings – regardless of which office the client contacts. Nonetheless, a large part of what we offer will still be our local perspective, but we will also have the support of international contacts. I think most people working at MS&L feel that way; our customers live in a global world, and we need to meet their needs.

**Olsen (WS):** We survey our people around the world annually on the importance of the global culture and other elements that make up the fiber of our firm. Everyone appreciates being part of a global firm and culture, this is often the reason why many join in the first place. The key focus for us is to figure out intelligent ways of converting this energy and desire to smart solutions and greater results for our clients. I get a kick every time I can delight a client with a genuine and intelligent global perspective in less than 24 hours.

**Costerton (H&K):** H&K is a truly global company, and I certainly feel very much part of this. There is nothing quite as satisfying as working on a truly international assignment with a multinational group of colleagues and getting insight on different skills and cultures. It sounds cheesy, but when it happens, it's a huge buzz, personally and professionally. I have been at H&K for seven years and although I am now in the UK company, I have worked on many international assignments and built up a strong personal network of contacts around the world. When your client asks you how something might work in Chicago or if you can fix a day of briefings in Warsaw and you know exactly who to ring and that they'll do a great job - it really makes you feel like you're part of a global culture.

***PRWeek: Many of you work for U.S.-based companies. Are your firms perceived as American in your regions? Would that be a positive or a negative thing?***

**Mincheff (Edelman):** Edelman is widely recognized as a global PR consultancy operating in Brazil, not necessarily as an American firm. This is positive as in many cases, clients depend on us for global perspectives, best cases from other markets, solutions for issues they may be facing currently, but that we've faced with clients elsewhere.

**Ovseyevitz (Martec PN):** Our company was born as a local firm, so we keep a big part of that local flavor and a deep knowledge of the local market. Being part of PN adds to our local reputation and gives us a global reach and world-class services – it is a perception of international, not American.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** On a superficial level it's easy to use the term "global" - call yourself global - and then start to believe in your own publicity. Far greater brains than mine have been debating the entire issue of globalization and what exactly it means. Part of that issue is that for many people "globalization" means "Americanization." The truth is that most of the best firms, most of the best thinking - not all, mind you - but most of it comes from the U.S., at least as far as our industry is concerned.

We have 80-plus offices throughout the world and so in that sense Fleishman-Hillard can claim to be truly global. But we're not smug about this. Our president and CEO, Dave Senay, talks eloquently about Fleishman-Hillard's culture being a salad bowl of different ingredients - Asian, Irish, British, African, etc., and I think this is right. We have to go beyond the obvious and make sure that not only are we not just American, we're also not just Anglo-Saxon. We have a strong and growing German voice in our firm. Our understanding of Africa and the Middle East is becoming deeper by the day and so on and so forth.

But at the end of the day it is others - our clients, the media, and our own staff - who decide, based upon how we behave, whether we are truly global or not. We've gone as far as just about anyone in our industry but we're not nearly satisfied that we have gone as far as we can or intend to go.

**Olsen (WS):** America has fostered a lot of great thinking and practices in PR, but I think the nature of excellence is changing. It used to be all about best practices, what was tried and true. Now, with the Internet and increased diversification, it is boldness, relevance, and the ability to connect with ever-changing cultures that matters.

The innovation now happens everywhere, and it is a very exciting time for our profession. We are asked more and more often to come into the boardroom, yet the undercurrents and cultures are increasingly challenging to connect with and influence. Therefore, cultural, educational and religious diversity and understanding are fundamental characteristics of a global agency, and this needs to be reflected at all levels.

**Costerton (H&K):** I agree that globalization has often, in reality, meant Americanization, or at least a strong Anglo-Saxon bias. This isn't surprising given that many clients are U.S. multinationals. But as the world's economic dynamics are changing, the strength of voice inside the firm is changing with it. Asia is a huge powerhouse for H&K right now and the Anglo-Saxons are learning fast how to do business in Shanghai or Seoul. Teams in London are being directed in Asian-business culture and are rapidly learning that this is how they will grow business – not the way it's always been done. It's interesting for the teams and it's opening up huge new opportunities for growth. But they have to adapt. One size no longer fits all.

***PRWeek: Is there much adoption of new communications tools like blogs, podcasts, social networks, news aggregation tools in your a) offices and b) geographic region? Do you read blogs to keep up with trends?***

**Atan (Lewis):** We use blogs, podcasts and news aggregation tools to keep up with global news and trends. Personally, I find blogs a good way of getting into the mindset and to aggregate the opinions of end-users. However, one needs to exercise his or her own opinions and filter the information. There is such a thing as information overload.

In general, these new communication tools are very useful in strategizing and ensuring that the PR campaigns you develop are in-tune with market sentiments.

**Kempe (MS&L):** Blogs have become an increasingly important tool for identifying the currents in public opinion, and I regularly try to follow a number of blogs, both those of private persons and of various opinion leaders. In Scandinavia, MS&L's subsidiary

company JKL was the first to start a corporate blog. It was widely read by opinion leaders and others in the industry.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** Yes, it's a very big deal and comes from John Graham all the way through the organization. Fleishman-Hillard has had a very strong interactive practice group incorporating all of the above for the last five years, but a recent initiative is called Next Great Thing (NGT). Apart from being enormously helpful for clients as they themselves try to come to grips with this revolution, it is designed to educate all of our front line staff in how to build these new media into every campaign we undertake.

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** Mark Penn, CEO, Burson-Marsteller is completely focused on digital communication and is focusing the entire company towards this end. At Genesis B-M, CEO, Ashwani Singla has a Blog for internal communication and uses it for communicating thought pieces such as Work/Life Balance. Useful comments from colleagues have been very encouraging. Clients are still a little apprehensive of focusing resources to this end. We are confident that they will do so soon enough.

***PRWeek: How do you use new technologies to communicate across the globe with a) other agency offices and b) clients. Are teleconferences still the norm, or are you pushing communications with blogs, wikis, or videoconferences?***

**OVseyevitz (Martec PN):** New technologies are in different stages of development around the world. The use of these technologies depends a lot on the country where you are. In Mexico we use web-based technologies like intranets and extranets for internal communications and to share information with our clients. Conference calls are still widely used and the adoption of new things like blogging is being piloted for some clients. We are looking at the evolution of technology and the opportunities they bring to make our communications and our client programs more effective internally and externally

**Atan (Lewis):** Technology certainly helps better internal communications and, if used properly, helps deliver effective communication campaigns across the globe. We invest over \$100,000 a year, to ensure that our operations are in step with new technologies, adopting wiki-enabled technologies, blogs, RSS and desktop video communications to integrate our offices. Clients would not only benefit from consultants having the most up-to-date industry news and trends - which is an important part of our craft, but are supported by consultants that have the tools to respond to these news and trends quickly and efficiently.

Having said that, technology is only as good as its adoption. Like Karen rightfully pointed out, different markets are at different stages of development. In addition, the acceptance amongst end-users is key. The best technologies would only be effective if people use it.

**Saunders (Fleishman-Hillard):** We have a number of communities on our intranet where we both converse and share information. There is also a forum for our interactive practice group. Some of us have blogs, though not me. (But hey, watch this space!) All of this is hugely important, but as a company we put huge emphasis on face-to-face meetings. Paul Johnson, one of the leaders in our firm, came to Brussels for 24 hours just this week to attend some very worthwhile meetings and the 15th

anniversary of our office there. It's very much in the DNA of Fleishman-Hillard to get out there and actually meet REAL people.

There is danger in all of what's going on that we lose touch or reduce its importance. That would be a big mistake in my view and we're not going to make it.

**Sagar (Genesis Burson):** Our web-based intranet allows us to connect, share and collaborate across all our offices and if required with clients as well. Within the intranet is a web huddle for group presentations, learning and reviews. Conference calls are still prevalent as it depends on the need and capabilities of participants.

– By Keith O'Brien *PR Week USA*, 26 June 2006

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