

The role of CEOs as communications experts

 By [Jennifer Leppington-Clark](#)

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As the highest ranking official within a company, the CEO has many roles they need to fill. From managing the day-to-day operations of an organisation's resources and people, to ensuring boards and other external stakeholders are satisfied, the CEO's checklist can be long and daunting.



Source: www.pexels.com

In addition, as they navigate this hyper-connected, unforgiving social media era, the best brand leaders also have to make it a priority to communicate effectively. Given that remote working is now the norm for organisations across the globe, leaders and managers must also work to build trust with their people through regular communication – ramping up their employee listening efforts and above all showing compassion and humility.

Looking at statistics, this mindset is clearly a huge missed opportunity:

- Deloitte's 2020 Leading Virtual Teams [report](#) found that virtual distance can lower leader trust by 83%, decrease the ability for employees to innovate by 93%, and decrease overall engagement by 80%
- A recent [Interact/Harris Poll](#) shows that 91% of employees they surveyed think that their leaders lack communication skills
- According to a 2019 report, 77% of consumers would rather purchase from a company where executives are active on social media.
- The same study indicates that although 48% of S&P 500 and FTSE 350 CEOs now have a social media presence, only one in four have posted within the past year.
- LinkedIn reports that over 46% of all social media traffic to company websites comes from this platform.

Social media has given consumers and employees unprecedented access to brands and their representatives, encouraging them to hold brands accountable in real-time. Transparency and maintaining a human presence online are critical for the success of any company and their CEO.

Understanding how to build your brand on social media channels – and specifically the go-to business platform of LinkedIn – is now a business imperative. Why? The answer seems obvious: as a professional, LinkedIn is the primary way to connect with others and brand yourself online; participants in Business Insider Intelligence’s Digital Trust Report have consistently ranked LinkedIn as the most trusted social media platform annually (2017 to 2020).

As such, I have become one of those people on LinkedIn, looking at status updates, news articles, profiles of connections, searching for potential referral partners, and more. And I can say, with proven consistency and honest conviction, the strategy does work. Everyone tries to check you out on LinkedIn before you meet, and first impressions, as you know, go a long way.

Aside from the personal gains of communicating your brand correctly, there are a variety of corporate reasons to get it right:

- **Build internal support** – Having a beautifully scripted vision and mission statement that sits on a company website is all fine and well, but what are you actually doing with it?

By having a CEO on LinkedIn who is vocal about the company’s mission, vision, and values – and addresses how the company is living up to these promises – can act as a rallying cry for all employees to embrace these values in all they do at work. Not only is this great for employee morale, but it can positively influence customers and prospects as well.

- **A trusted and updated resource** – Social media has made it easier than ever to gain access to news (and fake news) far quicker than ever before; many people are struggling to just keep up. In the past, CEOs could get away with in-person roadshows twice a year or a bi-monthly mailers, but these all take time and when it’s a time-sensitive issue, you have to move quickly.

By curating LinkedIn content that constantly engages with your audience, you are creating a platform that they can trust and provides them with credible information. This will serve you well when you have something negative to share. The last place you want to find yourself in is sharing your first post and it’s about a problem. There is credibility in transparency regardless of the news, and followers will appreciate open clarity far more than sporadic negative announcements.

- **Attract the best talent** – Attracting the right talent is one of the biggest challenges that companies are faced with today. According to a survey by CEO.com, 78% of employees want to work for social CEO because they consider them to be better leaders and more trustworthy. The same study found that 93% of employees believe social CEOs are better equipped for crisis management, while 94% believe they enhance the company’s brand reputation.

Having a CEO who is open to talking about their company could get the right job seekers interested in applying for a position. The tone is set at the top – and people looking for a career need to feel like the CEO shares their values and that there’s a future of growth at the company.

Without utilising social media, CEOs are missing a crucial opportunity to break down barriers between the C-suite and their employees. When a CEO is active with posts, updates and even videos, they are demonstrating that they want to create visibility and engagement with stakeholders.

Of course, a profile is always the logical starting point for any LinkedIn activity. If your CEO is “social shy,” take it one step at a time. We’ve made that step even easier with the introduction of our LinkedIn Executive Training programme, which is designed to help business executives and CEOs understand the essentials of social media and how they can use it for business. We’ve taken the daunting aspects of the LinkedIn platform and provided you with an executable and maintainable strategy that will help you become the company champion in no time.

With the high-speed rate that the social world is evolving, can you really afford not to learn how to properly leverage your brand to position yourself and your company appropriately on LinkedIn?

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- Jennifer Leppington-Clark is the managing director at Hill+Knowlton Strategies South Africa.
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