

BACHELOR'S THESIS

HANZE UNIVERSITY, GRONINGEN

A DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
FOR THE MERCK GROUP



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mediaman // expect more from digital

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Executive Summary

Computers, the internet, and mobile phones have evolved into a major means of communication and into an essential source of information. This is why companies need to have comprehensive communication strategies to effectively reach and positively influence target groups through these digital technologies.

This research report examines how the Merck Group can boost the recruitment of young professionals through a digital communication strategy. Digital marketing channels are unlike ordinary media, for example television, print media, and radio, as they provide reverse channels. As a result, one-way communication is not enough anymore. Two-way communication is the key. To be successful in digital marketing, companies need to engage with their target groups, which means they need to open up for a dialogue.

Necessary characteristics of beneficial interaction with a target group are, among others, interesting content, suitable channels and techniques for communication, as well as appropriate metrics.

This study found out that young professionals perceive their jobs mainly as an opportunity for self-actualization. Thus, conversation topics that involve careers rather than jobs and point out clear opportunities for employees to prosper within a company are likely to interest young professionals. Meaningful Corporate Social Responsibility makes the Merck Group an attractive employer for young professionals. Consequently, certain activities that emphasize Merck's social responsibility have to be a part of the communication content.

This study also outlines the behavior of young professionals in social media. The majority of them maintains profiles on social networking sites and visit these platforms on a daily basis. They are mainly passive internet users and read forums, are interested in blogs, and watch videos. In contrast, a steadily growing minority of young professionals are more actively engaged with the internet. They publish their own content and comment on the content other users produce. After familiarizing itself with these different user groups, the Merck Group needs to have a presence on social networks and in the blogosphere to ensure the content effectively reaches young professionals.

The communication efforts need to be simultaneously authentic and interactive to be convincing. Employee testimonials are a suitable technique to guarantee a convincing communication process. Proper reverse channels like chats and mobile phone integration guarantee authentic communication, and provide interactivity that enhances the user experience. Moreover, the Merck Group is advised to offer clear guidelines on how to use social media to their employees to encourage employee branding.

The objective of receiving more applications from young professionals is affected by the reach, the image, and the interactivity the chosen communication strategy provides. Page impressions, positive vs. negative ratios, and comments, among others, are metrics that track the effectiveness of the strategy. Adjustment options like a corporate blog, CSR activities, and the speed of the correspondents influence these key pillars and help to accomplish the objective.

It is recommended that the Merck Group implements a three-level strategy to effectively reach and convince young professionals of the fact that the Merck Group is an attractive employer: (1) Merck's career page on the first level, (2) a blog and an e-journal as content distributors on the second level, and (3) Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and mobile phones as communication channels on the third level.

Terms of Reference

The aim of this project is to provide the Merck Group with recommendations on how to design a digital communication strategy that effectively reaches the target group of young professionals. One definition of digital communication states that it is “electronic transmission of information that has been encoded digitally”.¹ In other words, digital communication is mainly based upon information transmitted via the internet.

Definition of the target group

The target group of this project are so called young professionals that are defined for the purposes of the project as talented, young adults in early stages of their professional career. In more detail, the term refers to:

- ➔ people with a higher educational background (talented)
- ➔ people aged between 18 and 34 (young adults)
- ➔ people with less than five years of professional work experience (early stages of their career).

A beneficial dialogue is the key

In order to fulfill the aim of this project it is crucial to identify how the Merck Group can create a beneficial dialogue with young professionals. Therefore, five key questions need to be answered. Firstly, where can young professionals be found? As a matter of fact, it is imperative to know where they are to be able to reach them. Secondly, what are young professionals looking for? To make them listen, the Merck Group needs to serve information young professionals are interested in. Thirdly, why are young professionals looking for this particular information? Through understanding their motives, it is possible to create content that most likely catches their attention. Fourthly, what are young professionals’ preferred ways of communication? If the Merck Group offers their target group communication channels they are familiar with and thus like to use, it will increase the chance for a dialogue. Finally, which information sources do young professionals trust most? To emphasize a message, it is beneficial to identify the most trusted sources and to deliver the content through these particular sources. These five key questions will be answered by research questions 1 and 2 of this project. They refer to the content and channels of the communication strategy. Research questions 3 and 4 provide solutions for suitable communication techniques and metrics that measure the effectiveness of the chosen communication strategy. Appropriate metrics are able to measure the ROI of the digital communication strategy, and these return-on-invest calculations are indispensable to properly justify financial and human investments.

¹ Dictionary.com, *digital communication*, [Online], Available: <http://bit.ly/4DVHSj> [Last accessed: 2009, Oct. 19].