



The Communication of Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility in Large Canadian Companies

Communication Trends on the Web 2006 to 2010

Highlights

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Communication Trends on the Web: 2006 to 2010

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Highlights

General informations

- The web-based communication behaviour of some one hundred of the largest Canadian companies was studied with regard to sustainable development and social responsibility (SDSR) over the course of five years between 2006 and 2010.
- The companies were selected on the basis of having been ranked among the 100 largest companies, according to revenue, in a 2006 ranking conducted by *Les Affaires 500 : Les 500 au Québec* et *Les 500 au Canada* (LesAffaires.com).
- All types of organizations were studied —publicly traded companies, privately held companies, and state-run corporations— allowing to draw a comprehensive portrait with regard to sustainable development or social responsibility issues.
- The communication behaviour of large Canadian companies was also studied by activity sector: natural resources, finances, manufacturing, services, commerce and holdings.

Overall results

- Communication about SDSR on the web is widespread among large Canadian companies.
- In 2010, more than 70% of the sample had a section specifically dedicated to these issues on their website.
- A 60% increase of SDSR sections was recorded between 2006 and 2010.
- The fastest overall progression took place during the 2006-2008 interval.

Other forms of extra-financial communications

- Communication concerning SDSR is prioritized over all other forms of extra-financial communication on the web.
- There is a clear downtrend of focusing exclusively on one activity, be it environmental initiatives, community support, or corporate giving, when communicating a company's extra-financial performance.
- By 2010, the absence of any form of extra-financial communication on the web seems to no longer be a viable option among large Canadian companies; this option has practically disappeared.

Ease of access – Content quantity

- Ease of access to information improves and the quantity of the content increases once a SDSR section is created.
- From 2008 on, all SDSR sections that offered downloadable documents to complement their web content featured at least an annual SDSR report.

Sectoral results

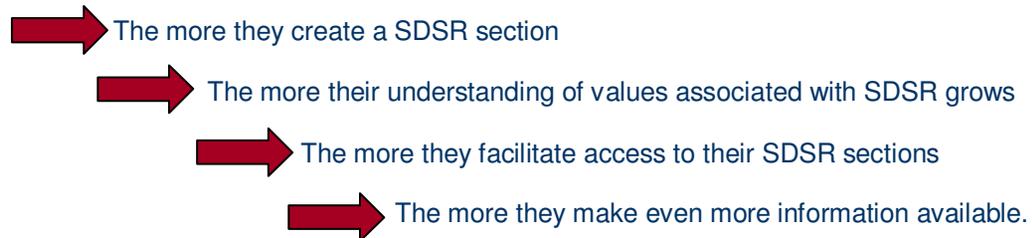
- The communication behaviour on SDSR on the web is strongly determined by the sector of activity.
- Companies belonging to activity sectors with a strong environmental and social impact tend to develop a discourse on SDSR more rapidly and more extensively than those belonging to other sectors.
- Here, the natural resources sector ranks top, followed by the finance sector.
- The service sector experienced the most rapid evolution.

MAIN FINDINGS

More than a passing fad that may disappear within a few years, this research conducted over a period of five years reveals that communication about SDSR is increasingly widespread among large Canadian companies. In general, the trend manifests itself by an eagerness to improve the quantity and the quality of information. Over the years, the experience of an SDSR section on the web is generally accompanied with a greater correlation of the content with SDSR values. In addition, the study demonstrates the awareness that is taking root within large organizations as to the importance of disclosing SDSR performance: as of 2008, all companies that offered complementary downloadable information on their site openly disclosed an annual SDSR report.

Globally, web-based communication on SDSR in large businesses evolves as described below:

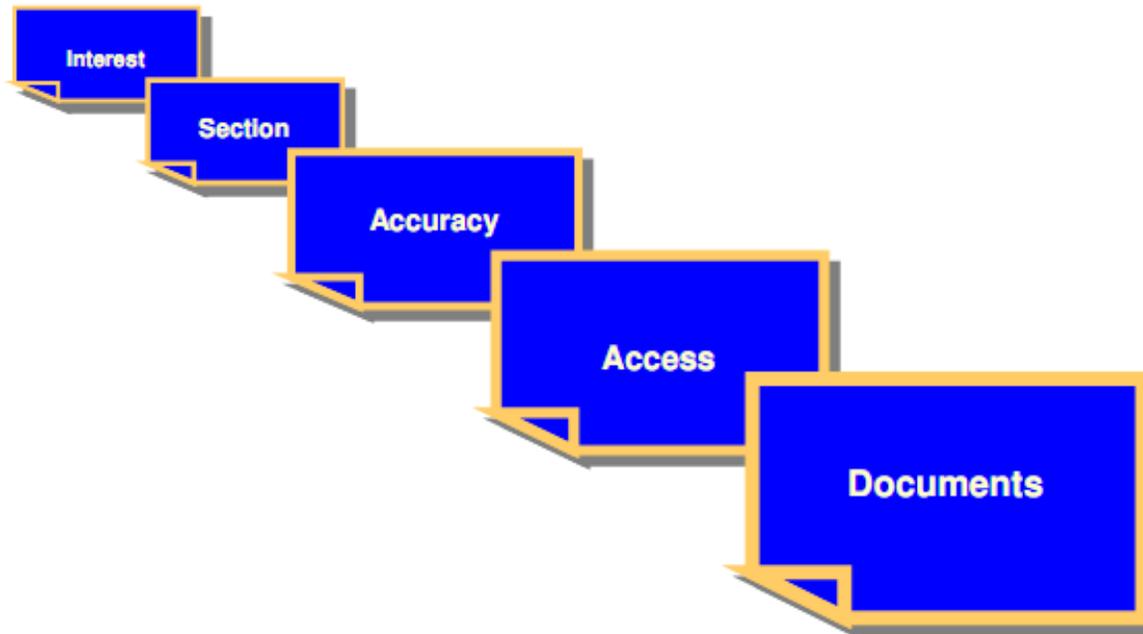
The more large companies become interested in SDSR



PATHWAY

WEB COMMUNICATION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN LARGE CANADIAN COMPANIES

2006-2010





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Solange Tremblay is an Associate Professor at the Department of Social and Public Communication at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She created and directed at UQAM a research group on communication, sustainable development, and social responsibility of organizations and has co-directed the creation of a postgraduate program on the social responsibility of organizations that integrates communication and management sciences. Regularly solicited to consult on the essential role of communication as related to these new values in society, she is also the author and coauthor of numerous publications and studies. Since 2011, Solange Tremblay is the president of SUSTAINABILITY|COMMUNICATION Group, a group of researchers and experts on these topics.

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After a career of some dozen years in communications and management and many years of teaching in public relations and management at various Quebec universities, Jacques Baronet was a professor of entrepreneurship at Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey, USA. He is today professor of entrepreneurship and innovation at Université de Sherbrooke, where he also directed its *Institut d'entrepreneuriat*. Apart from his teaching and research activities on entrepreneurship and management, he is interested in issues of sustainable development and the social responsibility of companies.



SUSTAINABILITY|COMMUNICATION Group

The SUSTAINABILITY | COMMUNICATION Group focuses on issues related to communication, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, as well as ethics in communications. Bringing together well-known researchers and specialists, the team's activities are centered on the development and sharing of knowledge and know-how on these questions that are central to all communication practices.



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