

FROM GUESSING TO PLANNING:

Placing C-Suite Executives in the Most Strategic Forums

As the economy slowly recovers and companies reposition themselves for growth, executives are once again looking to engage with key constituencies and industry peers. As noted in Weber Shandwick's *Five-Star Conference Study*, the C-suite recognizes that business leadership forums are of enormous value as they bring vital constituencies together in one room. Business leader visibility at these events puts a face on the company, disseminates important messages tailored to the audience, and builds the profile of the organization.

But how are executive communications professionals — those who are responsible for recommending events to C-suite execs — surveying the leadership forum landscape, staying attuned to trends in thought leadership, and making sure they're putting their people in front of the most strategic audiences with just the right message?

That's what global public relations firm Weber Shandwick and executive communication journal *Vital Speeches of the Day* set out to discover with a new survey of executive communications professionals. Several dozen people from North America, Europe, Asia Pacific and the Middle East responded to our survey, conducted during April 2010. Due to the small sample size, these results are anecdotal rather than empirical; but they are compelling, nevertheless.

"Communicators who support C-suite execs are under a lot of pressure to identify the best forums, and to get their chiefs placed strategically and successfully," says David Murray, editor of *Vital Speeches*. "We hope this survey helps them move from guessing and hoping to planning and strategizing."

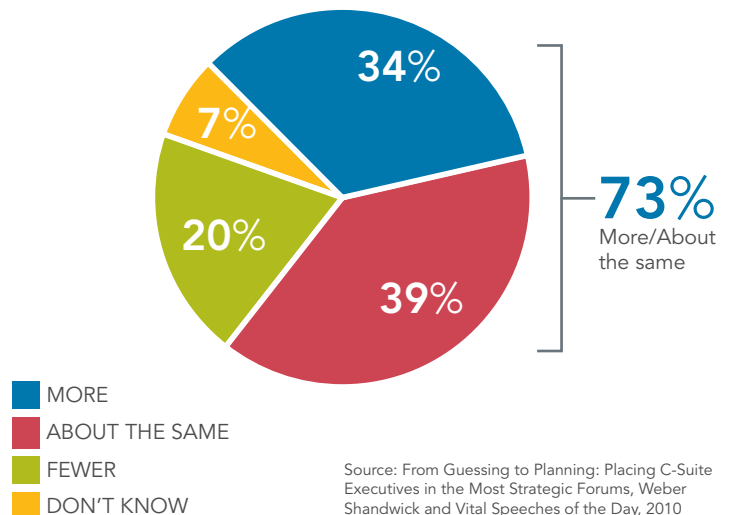
"Essentially, this new data validates what we've been saying to our clients. While financial media continues to be the preferred outlet for enhancing corporate reputation by executives, the strategic use of high-level speaking opportunities is steadily becoming a close second," said Jennifer Risi, executive vice president of Weber Shandwick's Global Strategic Media Group and leader of the VOICEBOXX™ suite of services. "As engagement with external audiences grows in importance, companies need better counsel to marshal their resources and the complex landscape of leadership events to secure senior management visibility and positioning."

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY INCLUDE...

Speaking-engagement participation and interest, particularly CEO interest, has grown considerably, not waned, during the tumultuous past two years.

- » Most external corporate communications professionals/ executive speechwriters (73%) report that their C-suite executives are participating in at least the same number of business leadership conferences compared to two years ago. In fact, a large group (34%) says that executive speaking has increased.

Are C-suite executives at your organization speaking at more business leadership events, about the same number, or at fewer business leadership events compared to two years ago?



"The CEO wants visibility, the business units request it, and the competitive environment demands it."

– Global Fortune 500 communications executive

- » Why are executives increasingly leveraging speaking engagements? Among the reasons respondents cited:

“Need for more exposure to different audiences”

“More commitment to getting our message out”

“Seeking more visibility in a competitive market”

“It is important to raise our profile”

- » Of the various C-suite executives, the chief executive officer is by far the most interested in speaking at business leadership conferences (49%) followed distantly by the chief marketing officer (11%).

The stakes are high for ensuring a successful CEO event placement, with CEOs needing to convey important messages that impact their company’s business and reputation. Adding to the pressure on executive communications pros are the demands for top-tier event placement.

- » The top three reasons for CEOs to speak at conferences are:

1 : Establish or reinforce company thought leadership (61%)

2 : Attract new customers and/or reinforce existing customer relationships (58%)

3 : Help define/redefine the brand (52%)

- » The venues CEOs most want to speak at, according to those surveyed, are:

1 : Top tier business leadership events, such as conferences hosted by *Fortune*, *The Economist*, *BloombergBusinessWeek*, *Forbes*, *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, etc. (44%)

2 : Public policy conferences, such as Brookings Institute, Rand Corporation, Centre for European Policy Studies, etc. (41%)

3 : Business schools, such as Wharton, Kellogg, London School of Economics, etc. (31%)

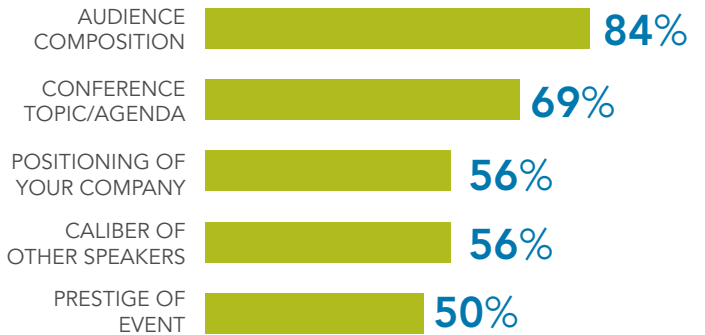
- » The World Economic Forum (Davos) is considered by external corporate communications professionals as the event that generates the most positive word-of-mouth in the global business community (44%).

The success of an executive placement at a business leadership event, and consequently the reputation of the person who placed him or her, is judged largely by qualitative factors.

- » CEOs gauge their own performance at speaking engagements primarily by reaction from the audience (e.g., audience feedback, Q&A session) and secondarily by media response/coverage.
- » Audience composition is the top factor considered when identifying appropriate venues for C-suite speaking engagements (84%). Audience composition is difficult to guarantee, as all kinds of external events can alter an event programmer’s audience line-up.

In general, which of the following are among your top criteria for determining the best speaking engagement “fit” for any of your organization’s C-suite executives?

TOP 5 CRITERIA



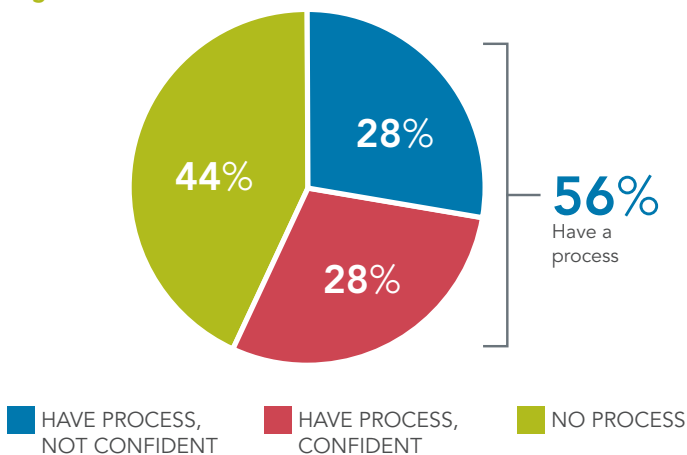
Source: From Guessing to Planning: Placing C-Suite Executives in the Most Strategic Forums, Weber Shandwick and Vital Speeches of the Day, 2010

External communicators are often “flying blind” when it comes to making the right decisions for placing executives at business conferences.

With substantial risk for making erroneous recommendations and the many variables in play surrounding events, many communicators depend upon multiple resources to help reduce the risk of making a wrong recommendation. However, at the end of the day, they admit that they need to do their own research.

- » Fewer than half of external corporate communications professionals and executive speechwriters (44%) have a process for identifying the best conferences to recommend to their CEOs. Of the 56% who do have a process, confidence in their process is evenly split — exactly half are confident and half are not.

Do you have a process for identifying the best conferences to recommend to your CEO? If so, are you confident that this is the best process for your needs and those of your organization?



- » External corporate communications professionals and executive speechwriters rely upon a variety of sources to keep up with most appropriate conferences for their C-suite colleagues or clients, with half (50%) using multiple resources.
- » External corporate communications professionals’ top three concerns when sending C-suite executives to a speaking engagement are:
 - 1: He/she won’t see the ROI of the event (56%)
 - 2: Audience composition is a poor match (53%)
 - 3: Low attendance (41%)

How do you keep up with the most appropriate conferences and events for your CEO and others in the C-suite?

Here are some methods...

- “ Talking with other executive communications people and tracking where other leading CEO/C-suite people are speaking.

Networking with colleagues, direct mail, prior experience with key venues.

Cold-calling, newsletter alerts.

1. Network with speechwriters outside my industry;
2. Assess venues from ‘Vital Speeches’;
3. Engage colleagues outside the US in identifying and evaluating venues;
4. Occasionally rely on professional agency assistance outside my company

Subscribing to e-mail updates of key organizations (think tanks, etc.) and cold-calling prospective organizations.

Research top platforms, ask business units what are best platforms for their needs.

Industry research and reliance on experienced colleagues.

Agency input.

Poll senior management, PR agencies and business units for suggestions.

Source: From Guessing to Planning: Placing C-Suite Executives in the Most Strategic Forums, Weber Shandwick and Vital Speeches of the Day, 2010

Communicators should follow a four-step process to conference selection:

- 1: Audit where their own company and competitors are speaking;
- 2: Rate conferences on performance criteria, such as its overall reputation, audience composition, past speakers, topic affinity, and media opportunities;
- 3: Score conferences on clearly defined strategic criteria. For example, will new or current clients will be present? Will business and positioning will be advanced?;
- 4: Assess whether conference opportunities are extendable to other audiences and third-parties.

C-SUITE TWEETING IS UNDER-LEVERAGED

Our survey also addressed the use and effectiveness of online communications for conveying C-suite messages to external audiences. The results show that online channels are not being used as effectively as they could be.

- » The tool most widely used to communicate externally by the C-suite is posting written messages on the company web site (66%). Despite its widespread usage, executive communications executives do not regard C-level web posts among the three most effective ways to communicate externally. Instead, the #1 most effective channel, according to respondents, is recorded video on the web site, followed by live webcasts and blogs.
- » Among the social networking tools, Twitter is considered more effective (25%) than Facebook (19%) and LinkedIn (16%) for external C-suite communications. Yet Twitter is woefully under-utilized.

It is reported by only 6% as a means that the C-suite uses to communicate now with external audiences.

- This finding reflects research recently released by Weber Shandwick, *“Do Fortune 100 Companies Need a Twittervention?”* The study found that 73% of Fortune 100 companies had a total of 540 Twitter accounts. However, about three-quarters (76%) of those accounts did not post tweets very often, and more than half (52%) were not actively engaged. The study concluded that Fortune 100 companies need a “Twittervention.” Executed successfully, Twitter can help companies engage with customers, build new relationships and create a new pool of advocates talking positively about their brands.

Weber Shandwick’s chief reputation strategist and executive communications expert Leslie Gaines-Ross remarked, “Video is a preferred communications channel today because of its ability to viscerally humanize executives. Twitter also has the added advantage of being immediate and customer-centric. We expect that these online channels of executive communications will grow over time as executives recognize how they complement, not replace, traditional means of communications.”

Online channels...	Used by C-suite for communicating externally	Rated as effective (rated 4 or 5 on 5-point scale)
Written message posted on your company’s web site	66%	36% (4)
Recorded video posted on your company’s web site	41%	55% (1)
Live Webcast over your company’s web site	31%	42% (2)
Blog	31%	42% (2)
YouTube	19%	32% (5)
Facebook	12%	19% (7)
LinkedIn	12%	16% (8)
Twitter	6%	25% (6)
None/Don’t know	19%	—

Whether the goal of a speaking engagement is to introduce a new product, build relationships, communicate thought leadership, or put a capable leader's face on the company, executives are seeking greater visibility. External communications professionals are on the front line for turning these opportunities into a successful strategy.

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ABOUT VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY

For 75 years, Vital Speeches has collected the best and most important speeches in the world in a monthly magazine. Its website, www.vsotd.com, is the center of news, tips, conversation and training for the executive communication professionals and speechwriters around the world. And Vital Speeches sponsors the annual Cicero Speechwriting Awards for excellence in the composition of oral communication.

ABOUT VOICEBOXX™

VOICEBOXX is a unique suite of exclusive executive service and product offerings offered by Weber Shandwick that helps companies strategically secure senior management visibility and positioning.

Please contact Jennifer Risi at 212.445.8375 or jrisi@webershandwick.com for more information.

ABOUT WEBER SHANDWICK

Weber Shandwick is a leading global public relations agency with offices in 76 countries around the world. The firm's success is built on its deep commitment to client service, our people, creativity, collaboration and harnessing the power of Advocates — engaging stakeholders in new and creative ways to build brands and reputation. Weber Shandwick provides strategy and execution across practices such as consumer marketing, healthcare, technology, public affairs, financial services, corporate and crisis management. Its specialized services include digital/social media, advocacy advertising, market research, and corporate responsibility. In 2010, Weber Shandwick was named Global Agency of the Year by *The Holmes Report* for the second year in a row; an 'Agency of the Decade' by *Advertising Age*, Large PR Agency of the Year by *Bulldog Reporter*, and Top Corporate Responsibility Advisory Firm by *CR Magazine*. The firm has also won numerous 'best place to work' awards around the world including Best Multinational Firm to Work For in EMEA" by *The Holmes Report* and a "Top Place to Work in PR" by PR News. Weber Shandwick is part of the Interpublic Group (NYSE: IPG).

For more information, visit <http://www.webershandwick.com>.