

OVERVIEW

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# *The* BOWEN CRAGGS *Index 2019*

A ranking of the world's best  
online corporate communicators

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# Overview: Rising quality and more attention from the top

By David Bowen, Founding partner, Bowen Craggs & Co

**When we published our last *Index of Online Excellence*, in February 2018, we said that ‘there were signs’ that online communication was being taken more seriously. It was tentative stuff, but only 15 months later we can be much more confident: there has been a significant jump in standards for many companies, which we hope has come from burgeoning management interest. Is our unglamorous corner of business finally getting the stardust it needs?**

Look at the top 10 scores: each one has increased. Look, more literally, at Nestle.com, BP.com, BASF.com or Bayer.com – all relaunched in the last year – and you will be struck by how opulent they are.

In the past we would have regarded such glamour with scepticism. Sites that looked ‘pretty’ had a habit of putting form over function. On a corporate site, that was a poor idea.

But our scores, which come from detailed analysis of how well corporate sites and social channels serve their audiences, tell another story.

The average for the top 10 has gone up from 209 to 213. Though our benchmarking methodology tends to keep scores flat, as we constantly adjust for generally rising standards, these numbers reflect a real rise in quality. As Bowen Craggs’

most experienced reviewer, Jonathan Holt, says, ‘we seem to have entered a new golden age of corporate web design’.

We have become used to sites that relaunch and then shed points, sometimes by the dozen, as they make bad decisions or let bugs creep in. So we were startled to see scores rising in all four relaunched in the top 10 – while 11<sup>th</sup>-ranking HSBC managed a chunky nine point rise with its new site. (Bowen Craggs does business with several of the high performers, but that does not affect the scores: see Methodology on page 13.)

To pour some cold water on the excitement, these increases are concentrated at the top of

*‘If there is a single message this year from the world’s largest corporations, it is that they accept that they are affecting the communities they live in and the planet they inhabit’*

the Index. The average for the full 30 has only nudged up by one point, to 201. The four companies that have slipped out altogether reflect what we might call the bad old days. Barclays has suffered from a decision to follow the navigation needs of marketing on its corporate site – rarely a good idea. Lukoil, L’Oréal and Ford have simply let things slip; management interest is not burgeoning at all. And the companies clustering at the bottom of the 30 also show score drops: again, wandering attention is the issue.

Nevertheless, the overall story is positive, with a consolidation of excellence among an elite group of companies. Others, we are confident, will join the elite. What lies behind it? It seems to us there are two major factors: one visible, the other below the surface.

## Companies need to explain themselves on digital channels

The visible one first. If there is a single message this year from the world’s largest corporations, it is that they accept that they are affecting the communities they live in and the planet they inhabit.

If the big investors are telling them, they had better believe it, and Larry Fink of BlackRock – which is as big as they get – says this: ‘Society

## Overview *continued*

is increasingly looking to companies, both public and private, to address pressing social and economic issues.’ It is not just investors that need to be convinced: if companies want to hire ethically aware millennials and Generation Z, they need to satisfy them too.

That is why Bowen Craggs has also produced the *Explain Yourself Index* – which concentrates on the elements of digital communications that determine how well companies tell their own stories.

The relationship between our two indices is subtle, but in essence the *Index of Online Excellence* is a multi-use tool designed to help professionals do their jobs better, while the *Explain Yourself Index* is a detailed but focused call to action (to explain themselves). For more on the differences, see *Methodology* on page 13.

It is not a given that a company that does well in one will do well in the other, but there is some overlap in the metrics. Which brings us back to the high scores we are seeing this year in the main Index. No fewer than five of the top 10 scorers get the highest possible score (one below the theoretical maximum) for our ‘company information’ metric, and scores for CSR reporting and ‘social responsibility’ are also being pushed up against the ceiling. All are core to the *Explain Yourself Index*.

*‘The increase in skill  
is the real reason  
companies are now able  
to improve consistently  
– even when they are  
managing a relaunch’*

The same is not so true of the other side of explaining yourself: reputation management. While companies such as Nestlé and Daimler are confronting issues head-on, others seem to be pulling back from discussions of company-specific controversies.

### **Growing team sizes, and skills**

What about below the surface? If explaining themselves is a surface driver for companies’ better scores, we need to burrow down to uncover the roots of the last year’s improvements. There has, it seems to us, been a slow but relentless acceptance in senior management that online channels are here to stay, and if you are one of the biggest companies in the world, you cannot run them on a shoestring. I know it doesn’t feel like that

for some. The governance survey we carried out last year showed that more online corporate communications departments had had their budgets cut than raised in the previous year.

But another story is revealed by our data on team sizes (which need not be correlated with budgets). We found a huge variety here, and it is a statistical minefield because of definitions, but when we learn that online communications teams have up to 40 people in them, we know they are not being ignored.

My favourite factoid here: GSK’s online comms was run by one person less than a decade ago; now there are 15 in its team.

And as the teams have grown, so have their skills – and scepticism. They are much less likely to go with whatever agencies suggest. Now they know the medium, they know their companies, and as a result they know what they need. The increase in skill is the real reason companies are now able to improve consistently – even when they are managing a relaunch. Online teams in the best companies are cauldrons of imagination and professionalism. Online governance is at the core, naturally, but experience built over the last 20 years is finally showing clearly. Add that to greater management commitment and the future looks – we hope – rosy.



## New entries and those that have dropped out

Although the score increases make this year's Index stand out, its overall shape is much as it has been. Only four of the 30 are from the US; the rest are Europeans. The one American high performer, Verizon, does well because it has pulled its estate together in a way few of its compatriots have. As we note in our *Leaders* piece on page 10, management – or governance – is what makes the difference. Management of digital channels is much more likely to be centralised in a sizeable team in Europe than it is across the Atlantic. One of the newcomers to the Index is, however, from the US: Texas Instruments; the other, Vinci, is French.

Behind the generally cheerful big picture, here is some detail:

### Corporate websites are continuing to get prettier – with big imagery and a minimalist aesthetic

There is a growing appreciation that images need to be carefully chosen – pulling smiling photos out of the stock library is not good enough. HSBC, another relaunched site, reflects this with an exceptional array of images. It even manages to make its latest quarterly results look sexy.

### Usability and elegance go together

For several years a drive to clear the screen of

'clutter' has led to a degradation of usability – hide menus and, not surprisingly, they are harder to find. The launch of a brand new BP site will surprise many – it makes extravagant use of left menus, without depressing the site's elegant impact (see *Leaders* article, page 10). Unilever also makes extensive use of left menus. But not everyone has seen the light: Nestlé's relaunch has dropped its visible menu, though it is working hard to make the best of its replacement.

### Mobile web usability now tends to be excellent, with fairly standardised devices that drill smoothly down to deeper levels

We noted particularly good implementation at BASF, Unilever, Nestlé and Daimler. Daimler still suffers from a problem most other have tackled – better usability on small screen than large.

*'There is a growing appreciation that images need to be carefully chosen – pulling smiling photos out of the stock library is not good enough'*

*'Podcasts have come back from the almost-dead, and are the height of fashion'*

Audience statistics suggest a 'device neutral' policy is the only sensible approach.

### Social media is now likely to be run by the same team as the corporate website, at least in Europe, and this shows in better integration

But the general enthusiasm for it at a corporate level seems to be dimming somewhat. Exceptions are Instagram, which continues to enthuse HR teams, and that oldest form of social media, the blog, which is alive and kicking. See page 12.

### Podcasts have come back from the almost-dead, and are now the height of fashion

They fulfil a useful role, and are likely to become increasingly popular. Shell has a shiny new *Energy Podcast*, Verizon has a series called *Up to Speed*, and Daimler has its upbeat *Headlight* series, aimed at jobseekers.

The fashion for generating 'stories' for their own sake is well past its zenith, but the need to provide engaging editorial is as strong as ever. Online magazines continue to improve, while

## Overview *continued*

### *‘The skills that support the best print publications are getting established in the online world’*

longer pieces that mix powerful text with beautiful imagery are gaining further hold. Eni has gone further than most in providing us with Eniday, a slick online magazine. In addition, there is Enipedia, an 800-entry encyclopaedia with a hefty database that also furnishes answers for the company’s sophisticated AskNow search engine. The skills that support the best print publications are getting established in the online world – often because the people with those skills have made the jump across.

**Another skill required in print but too often ignored online is that of being concise – in general, tight editing leads to better quality**

BP’s revamped sustainability section is an example – it has been edited right back and is, as a result, more readable.

**A continuing problem for some non-anglophone corporations is weak English**

It is rarely ungrammatical but can be inelegant. Daimler.com has this on its home page: ‘What is sustainability? What does this imply for our

doings?’ And where it displays quotes it uses the German style, with the first set of quotation marks at the bottom of the line. This looks odd and, for a world-straddling company, a foolish economy. Daimler is far from alone.

**Many companies recognise that corporate websites are increasingly important resources for customers – particularly ‘concerned consumers’ – and some have sites that serve marketing as well as corporate communications**

Pharmaceutical companies must tread carefully amid the regulations, but some do a good job of getting their messages across where they want. Roche’s stories about the way it helps patients are informative while at the same time carrying subtle messages of social responsibility.

**Corporate news sections increasingly serve groups beyond traditional media; they may be indeed be indistinguishable from online magazines**

Where this leaves the service for journalists is another matter; it is still often the weakest element in a corporate site. One exception though: more

*‘The service for journalists is still often the weakest element in a corporate site’*

companies are successfully exploiting Flickr for their image libraries, countering its appalling usability with their own routes into the photos.

**While companies are getting better at selling themselves to jobseekers, job search and application systems remain as varied as ever, and still live in separate worlds from the main sites** GSK is rare in trying to reinvent the form (see Leaders piece, page 10).

**Corporate social responsibility/Environmental, social, governance (CSR/ESG) reporting is increasingly sophisticated**

An interesting development is GSK’s refinement of integrated reporting, which gets it right for CSR professionals as well as investors.

**A detail but an important one: some companies are putting more effort into contact information**

For many, websites are simply a way of getting to people within a company – so it makes sense either to make that easy, or to try to answer their questions online. An excellent example comes from Vinci, the French construction group, which is a newcomer to the Index. Headquarters information and a map are displayed at the foot of every page, while the contact page points to contact details for all groups, to social media channels and gives a special number for visitors with reduced mobility. This is not only helpful, it gives the right messages too.

# Top 30

Figures in [brackets] = maximum scores | ↑ Score up from 2018 | ↓ Score down from 2018 | \* New entry to Index in 2019 | ♦ No score change from 2018

Position	[280] Total score		Company	Total score 2018	Position 2018	[60] Construction	[48] Message	[12] Contact	[32] Serving society	[32] Serving investors	[32] Serving the media	[32] Serving jobseekers	[32] Serving customers	[280] Total score
1	221	↑	<b>Nestlé</b> <i>www.nestle.com • As an exercise in online design, the re-launch has been an almost unmitigated success</i>	213	2	44	43	10	29	26	26	20	23	221
= 2	219	↑	<b>BP</b> <i>www.bp.com • A successful and slick relaunch, confounding fashion by retaining left menus</i>	213	2	46	40	7	27	27	23	25	24	219
= 2	219	↑	<b>GSK</b> <i>www.gsk.com • Carefully polished, with strong editorial supporting GSK's messages</i>	216	1	47	39	11	26	24	23	26	23	219
4	217	↑	<b>Bayer</b> <i>www.bayer.com • The visual refresh has effectively modernised an increasingly out-of-date template</i>	213	2	48	39	9	27	25	26	23	20	217
= 5	214	↑	<b>Eni</b> <i>www.eni.com • The global website and social media channels are doing a good job of supporting a shift in strategy towards greener energy</i>	212	5	46	37	11	28	25	23	22	22	214
= 5	214	↑	<b>Unilever</b> <i>www.unilever.com • Excellent use of online channels to position the company as environmentally and socially responsible</i>	209	6	49	40	9	26	24	20	23	23	214
= 7	207	↑	<b>Roche</b> <i>www.roche.com • A good performance owing to the resilience of its design and ongoing attention to editorial quality</i>	205	8	41	40	7	26	23	20	25	25	207
= 7	207	↑	<b>Shell</b> <i>www.shell.com • An editorially rich online presence that has benefitted from improvements to the navigation</i>	205	8	42	36	8	24	29	19	23	26	207
= 9	206	↑	<b>BASF</b> <i>www.basf.com • The estate has been relaunched since our last review, with a largely successful structure that has retained good underlying content</i>	202	10	43	37	8	24	25	24	25	20	206
= 9	206	↑	<b>ING</b> <i>www.ing.com • Provides a consistently good service to all audience groups, and has improved usability in the last 12 months</i>	202	10	43	36	10	25	24	23	22	23	206

# Top 30 *continued*

Position	[280] Total score		Company	Total score 2018	Position 2018	[60] Construction	[48] Message	[12] Contact	[32] Serving society	[32] Serving investors	[32] Serving the media	[32] Serving jobseekers	[32] Serving customers	[280] Total score
11	204	↑	<b>HSBC</b>	195	20	43	37	10	22	26	21	22	23	204
<i>www.hsbc.com • The bank relaunched its group corporate website at the end of 2018 and has continued to polish it during 2019</i>														
12	202	↑	<b>Total</b>	193	25	42	38	6	26	26	22	21	21	202
<i>www.total.com • A big mover up the Index, due to successful updates across the online estate</i>														
= 13	200	↓	<b>SAP</b>	201	12	38	38	8	24	24	21	23	24	200
<i>www.sap.com • A light redesign has only been partially successful, but other strengths keep its digital presence among the best in the world</i>														
= 13	200	↑	<b>Verizon Communications</b>	194	21	41	37	4	24	23	23	29	19	200
<i>www.verizon.com • Best-in-class editorial – including articles, videos and podcasts – overcomes usability weaknesses</i>														
15	199	↓	<b>British American Tobacco</b>	200	15	44	33	9	27	26	16	22	22	199
<i>www.bat.com • Bucking the trend for score increases among the top 30, but the digital estate continues to be powerful and engaging</i>														
16	198	↑	<b>Daimler</b>	191	30	39	36	6	24	23	24	24	22	198
<i>www.daimler.com • A visually contemporary affair that still suffers from usability problems, but has been improved in a number of ways</i>														
= 17	197	↓	<b>Novo Nordisk</b>	201	12	43	36	10	23	19	22	23	21	197
<i>www.novonordisk.com • Now showing signs of age, but use of social media for corporate messaging is among the best in the world</i>														
= 17	197	↑	<b>Zurich</b>	193	25	39	34	8	24	27	20	22	23	197
<i>www.zurich.com • An elegant look that stands the test of time, and big improvements in serving jobseekers</i>														
19	196	↑	<b>AstraZeneca</b>	194	21	39	38	8	25	23	19	24	20	196
<i>www.astrazeneca.com • Immediately makes a memorable impression thanks to the use of striking, colourful illustrations</i>														
20	195	↓	<b>Siemens</b>	206	7	35	38	8	24	22	22	24	22	195
<i>new.siemens.com • Plenty of good ideas and best practice, but a big score drop reflects a web presence at an impasse in other ways</i>														



## Top 30 *continued*

Position	[280] Total score		Company	Total score 2018	Position 2018	[60] Construction	[48] Message	[12] Contact	[32] Serving society	[32] Serving investors	[32] Serving the media	[32] Serving jobseekers	[32] Serving customers	[280] Total score
= 21	193	◆	<b>AXA</b> <i>www.axa.com • Among the sleekest and most visually impactful on the corporate web</i>	193	25	38	40	10	24	26	15	22	18	193
= 21	193	↓	<b>Rio Tinto</b> <i>www.riotinto.com • Starting to show its age a little, but has a strong and well-realized online magazine and a vibrant social media presence</i>	198	16	42	35	9	22	23	19	22	21	193
= 21	193	✱	<b>Vinci</b> <i>www.vinci.com • A compact, logically structured web estate that is particularly notable for its comprehensive contacts options</i>	n/a	n/a	39	33	10	22	25	24	24	16	193
= 24	192	↑	<b>Tetra Pak</b> <i>www.tetrapak.com • First and foremost a tool to communicate with B2B customers, but also effective at sustainability messages</i>	191	30	44	34	8	22	22	21	18	23	192
= 24	192	✱	<b>Texas Instruments</b> <i>www.ti.com • Comfortably one of the best in the world at customer journeys and decision-making materials</i>	n/a	n/a	36	33	9	25	25	17	20	27	192
= 24	192	↑	<b>Vodafone</b> <i>www.vodafone.com • Rich, editorially engaging reputation material, but confusing navigation</i>	191	30	37	33	6	24	24	21	23	24	192
= 27	191	↓	<b>Coca-Cola</b> <i>www.coca-colacompany.com • A swing towards providing more 'corporate' information, but the site still shines for its storytelling under the 'Journey' umbrella</i>	192	29	38	39	9	25	18	16	23	23	191
= 27	191	↓	<b>IBM</b> <i>www.ibm.com • Many updates since 2018, but the estate remains a federation of sites, rather than an integrated web presence</i>	194	21	37	34	8	24	21	19	24	24	191
= 27	191	↓	<b>Maersk</b> <i>www.maersk.com • Continues to set standards in design, but corporate visitors are now barely acknowledged, with a shift towards customers</i>	201	12	35	36	9	21	22	18	23	27	191
= 27	191	↓	<b>Nordea</b> <i>www.nordea.com • A well-built site, but the design is starting to look dated and a content cull has gone too far in places</i>	196	18	43	32	8	20	25	19	22	22	191

# Lessons from the leaders

**The best online communicators are getting ever better, and have created a kind of super league at the top. It is hard to score more than 210 using our methodology, yet Nestlé managed 221, and both GSK and BP got 219. Although we are constantly raising the bar for our scores – reflecting overall improvements in standards – these jumps reflect clear, documentable improvements.**

**The usual way to improve a score is through relentless polishing – which GSK has done with style. But the most remarkable stories come from Nestlé and BP. They have managed to increase scores from already high bases after relaunches, which is pretty much unprecedented. Only the tightest discipline can make such miracles happen.**

## 1<sup>st</sup> Nestlé Score: 221 (213 in last Index)

Nestlé relaunched its global website in early 2019, giving its global online presence a sleek, modern look. It has been an almost unmitigated success, despite the disappearance of left navigation. Nestlé has done its best to compensate for the inevitable issues this caused, and mobile navigation has improved even as desktop usability has slipped.

Nestlé has done three things right. First, it has taken care to preserve what was already working.

No corners have been cut. 'Ask Nestlé' continues to set the standard as a reputation management tool, supported by closely integrated social media channels. The searchable Flickr-integrated image library and the company's immersive history provision have been carried forward intact.

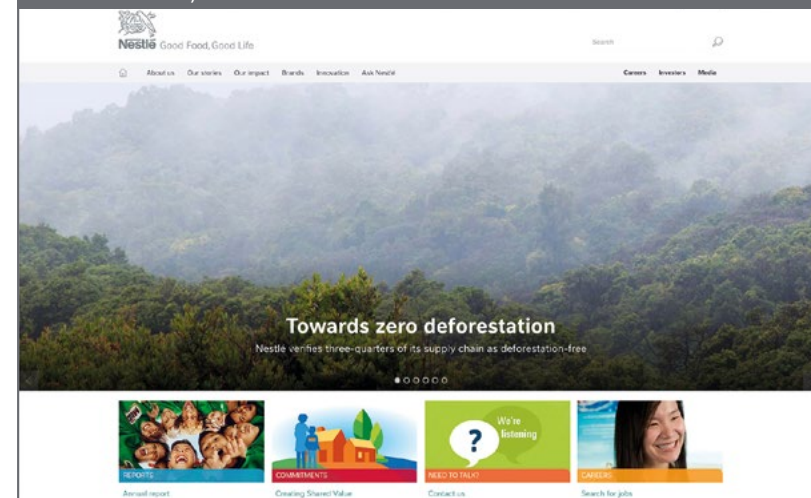
Second, it has fixed some of the site's weaknesses. Where imposing a flashy look too often undermines usability, the new visual style has itself improved information retrieval, for example, in a sleeker history timeline, brands section and country selector menu.

Third, and most impressive, Nestlé has re-launched not just Nestle.com but around 80 country sites, all with a consistent look and feel and shared information and messages. A huge undertaking, and one which means stakeholders will have a broadly consistent experience of the company, typically in their own language, no matter where they are.

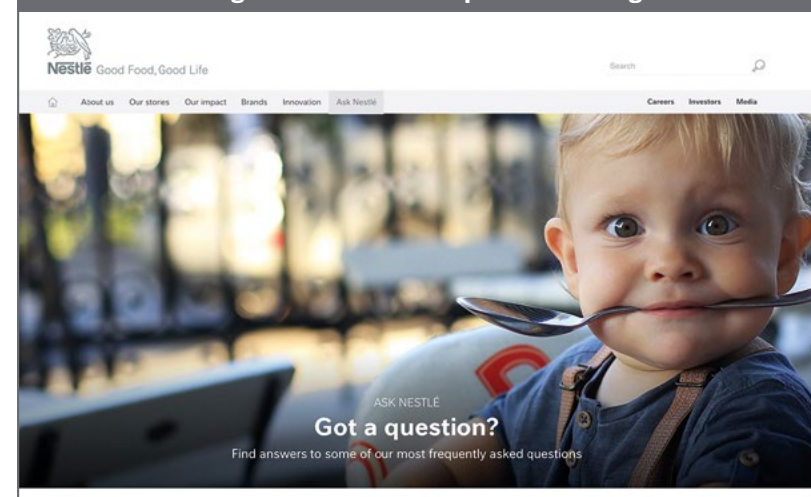
## =2<sup>nd</sup> BP Score: 219 (213)

There are two surprises in the relaunched BP.com. First, like Nestlé, it has managed to increase its score. BP has not been quite as ambitious in rolling out everything in one go, though the new template is spreading fast across the vast estate. Second, BP has chosen to go against the navigational tidal wave that demands navigation

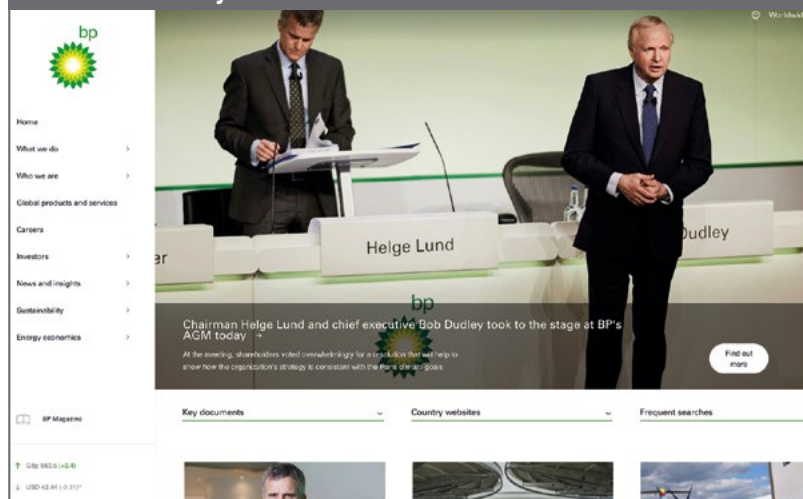
### Nestlé's sleek, modern site was relaunched in 2019



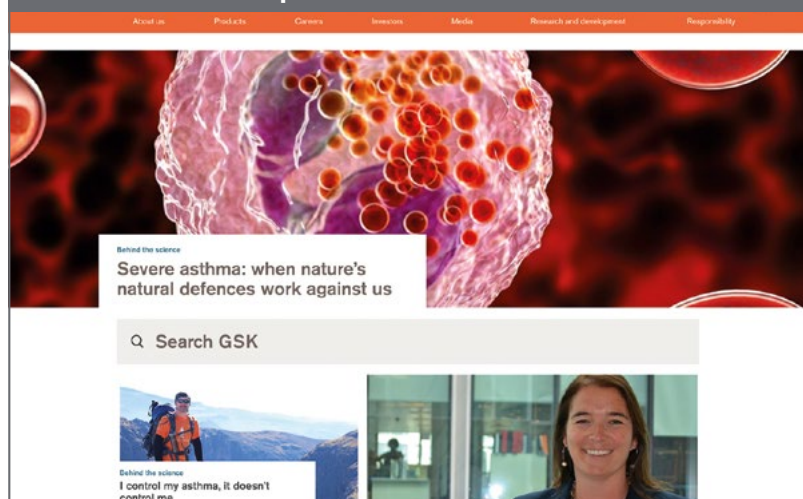
### Ask Nestlé: setting the standard for reputation management



### Excellent usability on the relaunched BP.com



### GSK.com continues to push the boundaries



be hidden in the name of visual impact. There is even a left menu on the home page. Usability is excellent, though not quite as good as on the previous site – orientation (knowing where one is) has slipped a little.

BP has always been good at working with its tricky brand colours of green and yellow, and it counters the argument that visible menus spoil the look with careful deployment of exceptional images.

A strength of the site is the way the company talks about itself and its industry. It works hard to communicate BP as a responsible, innovative and thoughtful company, which has learned the lessons of past mistakes (most significantly, the Gulf of Mexico disaster) but is looking forward to a positive future. It supports engaging areas such as the BP Magazine and Energy Outlook with the interactive Statistical Review of World Energy, positioning the site as a destination for those wanting to find out about energy as a whole, and not just BP.

**=2<sup>nd</sup> GSK**

**Score: 219 (216)**

GSK has restlessly worked to make an already good presence better. This is easier to do when you are not also relaunching, but is still a sign of rigorous control.

GSK.com looks sleek and modern, with particularly good use of captioned photos. It dropped left navigation three years ago and, like Nestlé, tries hard to match the usability of the previous template but does not always succeed. The country sites, which remain on the old template, are starting to look a little dated (though thanks to their menus, work rather better). Much strength lies in the way the company tells us about itself. 'About us' offers an exceptionally clear and well-structured overview, while the company's 'Our history' sub-section is one of the best on the web. The 'Behind the science' section offers an immersive look at what the company does and how it does it. All this is boosted by lively promotion on social media.

The site uses exceptionally clear language (in English anyway) to explain its approach to controversial issues such as animal testing and its relationships with health professionals. However there are slippages – for example, it has dropped a useful set of briefing pages on specific issues.

There are enough areas where GSK is pushing the boundaries to make it well worth watching, most strikingly in jobseeker communications. The company has a history of experimenting in this area, and it is currently reimagining how search and application systems should work, by stepping into the potentially exciting world of personalisation.



# Social media: new channels and old

**Big companies are still struggling to get the best out of social media – but alongside less happy signs we see two areas where they seem to be finding their feet.**

We know from our recent governance survey that most corporations, in Europe anyway, have now put social and web under the same teams. This makes sense because they are doing different parts of the same job. Yet we also spotted some signs of weaker integration than before. For example, Daimler has introduced a much longer home page, and as the links to social are at the bottom, this is a pretty good way of hiding them.

We also noted some loss of enthusiasm for social media itself. Unilever's default Facebook page – which includes the UK and most countries – has not been updated since March 2017 (though its US

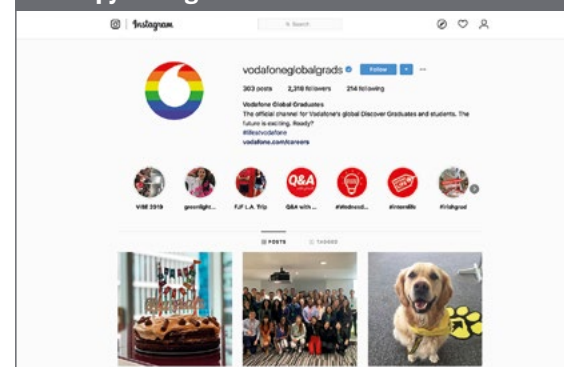
page is still active). Unilever does not have web and social under the same team; could there be a link?

One reason for avoiding social media is it can be a playground for your enemies. A company that knows this well is Nestlé; it has chosen to stay and fight. Even its blandest Facebook posts attract hostile comments – usually on unlinked but well known subjects such as palm oil or plastic packaging. But it is assiduous in addressing all serious posts, personalising prepared answers and linking to more on its site – usually in 'Ask Nestlé'.

Like most companies, Nestlé has also taken to Instagram. Though this is generally a less confrontational channel than Facebook or Twitter, hostility has followed the company here too. It does not respond in the same way, perhaps because the comments are less detailed, but also perhaps because it is not possible to embed active links to websites.

Careers-specific Instagram use is booming, with some companies trying really hard to connect with young audiences. Most use short videos, though pictures and text can work well. 'Vodafoneglobalgrads' has a chirpy video feed with recent joiners giving tips or answering questions sent in by jobseekers. Verizon Careers has a set of little films for 'Take your child to work day' (Nestlé matches this with dogs in the office). Life.at.bp says it 'celebrates our culture, colleagues and careers around the globe'. Many posts are contributed

## A chirpy Instagram video feed from Vodafone



by employees – an intriguing story is 'office views', which are particularly splendid from oil platforms. Although Instagram follower numbers are much lower than Facebook's, it has a more focused and friendly feel: it must be doing the companies good.

If Instagram is a newcomer, blogs are the oldest form of social media. But they are having a new lease of life. Daimler.com has 'Blog' as one of its main links, and here we find a nest of interesting posts in German and English. Many are about good works the company or its employees are doing around the world, and the responsibility message is underlined by providing a 'read aloud' version for the visually impaired.

Although blogs and Instagram could hardly be further apart in form, they have a shared role: to humanise otherwise anonymous corporations. Big companies might, perhaps, have finally found a comfortable space in the social media world.



# Methodology

**The Bowen Craggs Index of Online Excellence ranks the best online communicators in the world. There are 30 companies in this edition. The Index measures the entire corporate online presence: websites, social media and other digital channels, across all devices – computers, smartphones, tablets.**

We evaluate the online estates of the world's largest 200 companies by market capitalisation – writing up the elite in full for the Index, and pulling out best practice from many more (see below). Because market capitalisation goes up and down, we retain the best companies that have dropped out of the 200 – we have a greater interest in capturing best practice than applying strict criteria (we also include large private companies, such as Tetra Pak).

Our web analysis methodology is tailored to the needs of corporate sites. Unlike most brand or news sites, they are complex, deep and multi-functional. We put great emphasis on usability, but we also look carefully at messaging, and put ourselves into the heads of different groups of visitors to see how well they are served.

We look at social media channels both in their own right and as partners to the websites.

The *Index of Online Excellence* is widely regarded as the gold standard for measuring online digital communications:

- The methodology was created in 2007 but constantly evolves, based on continuing feedback from our network of large organizations and our own expertise;

and audience research with investors, journalists, policymakers, jobseekers and consumers.

- It is immune to fashion. Our reviewers look for the hard business case behind the latest trends and ask whether they are appropriate for large organizations.
- It is rigorous but not automated or a 'check box' exercise. We spend an average of 40 hours on the web estates we review, offering detailed judgments on the quality of text and video content. Every metric is judged by its relevance to the client, rather than 'is it there or is it not?' We are as much experts on how large organizations are run and managed as we are on the internet.

*Bowen Craggs has or has had commercial relationships with approximately two thirds of the companies in the Index. We are confident that this does not affect our judgment and scoring. Most of the companies involved are subscribers to our best practice database – we have not provided consultancy. Where we have provided it, we have been careful to maintain Chinese walls between consultants and reviewers.*

*We publish the detailed analysis that informs the Index scores in the Bowen Craggs Database; and all scoring and commentary are available and transparent to subscribers.*

*We provide quantitative measurement services to a number of companies in the Index. We are able to observe close correlations between the satisfaction results shown by these measurements and our own reviews.*

## HOW DO THE INDEX OF ONLINE EXCELLENCE AND THE EXPLAIN YOURSELF INDEX DIFFER?

We are often asked what the difference is between the *Index of Online Excellence*, which has been running since 2007, and the newer *Explain Yourself Index*, published in February.

The *Index of Online Excellence* is a multi-use tool designed to help communications professionals run their online channels better, while the *Explain Yourself Index* is a detailed but focused call to action to 'explain themselves' – that is to tell the outside world how they, as enterprises, are behaving. While there is overlap between the indices, they are quite different: indeed, it is possible to do very well in one and not at all well in the other.

The *Index of Online Excellence* covers the nitty-gritty elements of running websites – construction and usability; overall message and reputational positioning; and the detailed service given to jobseekers, investors, journalists and CSR professionals (see Methodology, left). It is global.

The lighter, more compact *Explain Yourself Index* focuses on US companies. *Explain Yourself* takes three metrics from the 26 metrics in the main Index (on company information, CSR/ESG reporting and 'building a reputation for responsibility'); then divides them into more granular sub-metrics; and adds extra elements about political engagement. We look at usability and design, but give them less attention.

In summary, the *Index of Online Excellence* is for digital professionals who already know the importance of corporate online communications and want to do better. The *Explain Yourself Index* is also a tool for practitioners, but it is especially powerful as a way of persuading time-starved bosses and your internal stakeholders about the importance of investing money and time in corporate digital channels.

# Behind the Index scores: the three views of digital comms

**The scoring and analysis in the *Index of Online Excellence* draw upon Bowen Craggs' unique perspective on digital corporate communications – the expert view, the external view and the internal view.**

## The expert view

The Bowen Craggs database, which contains all of the reviews that underlie our scoring, is the engine behind the *Index of Online Excellence*. It contains detailed reviews of the corporate web presences of the biggest 200 companies in the world by market capitalisation, and a library of best practice. The database is itself driven by the Bowen Craggs methodology for evaluating digital corporate communications across 26 metrics. The methodology was created in 2007 and is constantly evolving to take account of technology and platform changes; and the changing needs and behaviour of visitors.

## The external view

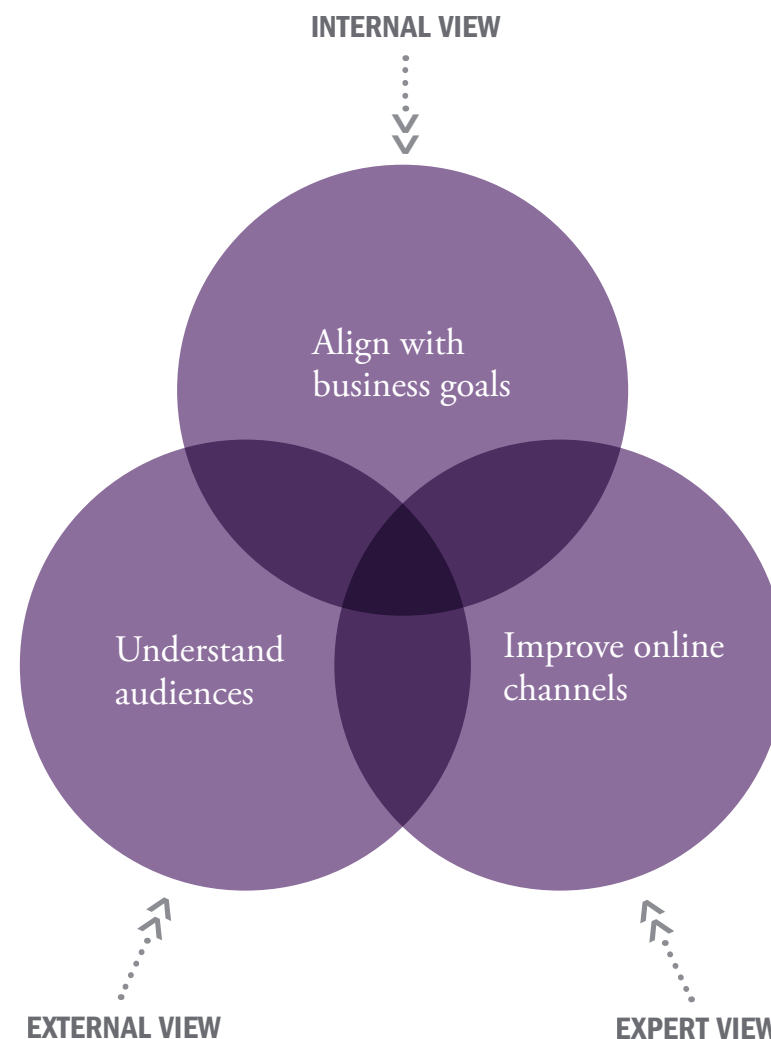
We are able to stay up to date with the changing needs and behaviour of visitors because we have a rich repository of audience research. Our data, more than 500,000 survey responses from a range of global sites with their associated Google Analytics sessions, looks at who visits, why they visit and opinions they form about the brand as a result. We have created personas based on the data, and these inform our expert reviews.

## The internal view

Our expert consultants are continually talking to our clients and the internal stakeholders they work with (HR, CSR, Media, IR, group corporate and senior leadership). These ongoing conversations, formal and informal, give us an understanding of the current challenges within corporate digital communications departments, and help us adapt our methodology, Index scoring and analysis.

## BOWEN CRAGGS SERVICES: THE BENEFITS

- Database: Pinpoint specific strengths and weaknesses of your online channels across 26 metrics; compare with best practice and use the scores to demonstrate improvements.
- Measurement: Hold better evidence-based conversations with your internal stakeholders and get management buy-in for improving the website and proving ROI.
- Ongoing advice: A direct line to experts who understand your business and work as an extension to your team.
- Capture senior management attention by showing how your corporate online presence compares against competitors, peers and leaders in online communications.
- Set a higher standard for your corporate online presence; prioritise your plans using our long-term and quick win recommendations to reduce mistakes and cut development time.





# About Bowen Craggs

## WE REVIEW. WE MEASURE. WE ADVISE.

To make your website and social media channels better for your business and your customers.

## WHAT WE DO

We are experts in global online corporate communications. We help you improve the effectiveness of your websites, mobile and social channels.

You can rely on the independence of our advice because we do not build websites. What we do is help you to improve your effectiveness with clear strategy, expert benchmarking, market research, analytics, best practice and content strategy.

Our research – gathered over 15 years and used by more than 50 of the Fortune Global 500 – can help you find and maintain the right course.

## BOWEN CRAGGS INDICES

The Bowen Craggs *Index of Online Excellence*, running since 2007, is established as the most credible global ranking of large corporate online estates. The lighter, more compact *Explain Yourself Index* focuses on US companies, and is a powerful tool for persuading bosses and internal stakeholders about the importance of digital corporate communications.

## THREE WAYS YOU CAN BENEFIT

Bowen Craggs is unique: we specialise in group-level digital communications. Here are three ways you can benefit from our knowledge and expertise:

### 1. Explore the world's most powerful resource for global web managers

The Bowen Craggs database is the engine that drives the *Index of Online Excellence*. The database contains all of the benchmarking

reviews and best practice reports that underlie our scoring. It is driven by constant audience research across all visitor groups. To find out more, visit [www.bowencraggs.com/what-we-do](http://www.bowencraggs.com/what-we-do).

### 2. Join the Bowen Craggs Club

We have built a powerful global network for leaders in digital corporate communications at the world's biggest organizations – the Bowen Craggs Club – with regular in-person and virtual meetings, including an annual conference, as well as an online community. To find out more visit [www.bowencraggs.com/Bowen-Craggs-Club](http://www.bowencraggs.com/Bowen-Craggs-Club).

### 3. Read our weekly insight and analysis

For regular commentaries on all aspects of online corporate communications, subscribe to our newsletter at [www.bowencraggs.com/](http://www.bowencraggs.com/) subscribe and blog at [blog.bowencraggs.com](http://blog.bowencraggs.com). Visit our website at [www.bowencraggs.com](http://www.bowencraggs.com) for practical advice and deep analysis for online communications professionals.

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