

# IABC EMENA conference tackles leadership communication

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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LONDON: The IABC EMENA (International Association of Business Communication - Europe, Middle East and North Africa), the counterpart of the Africa region of the IABC, hosted their annual conference titled "Power to the People", addressing the key trends in communication around giving the power of voice to all stakeholders - from employees to customers and community.

Day one of the two-day conference covered insights from leading global communication practitioners who addressed the two most challenging aspects of communication today: people's opportunity to be heard (encouraging ideas, innovation, collaboration) and best practice to translate that into practice.

## Talking and listening

Communication has evolved greatly over the past few years, but is still struggling to shift from cascade to conversation. The idea is to move away from the reliance and push communication towards a more effective way of communicating within an organisation. Speakers addressed the shift in focus from what is globally known as "broadcasting messages" to "developing a genuine and productive dialogue" within business.

Ulrike Felber is a senior communications manager at HSBC who felt that too many people have their fingers permanently on the "talk" button. In true multi-directional communication there are two parts - talking and listening. HSBC's answer was the establishment of 'HSBC Exchange'. Ulrike shared their new-format team meetings, which moved managers from speaking to listening to combat the loss of leadership trust.

This idea has changed how people at HSBC talk to each other, and provides senior management with great insights and innovative ideas. 'Social' is a behaviour, not a system. She believes that if your business doesn't have a 'social' aspect among the employees, you won't find it on any tool in the organisation.

## The digital revolution

Claudia Vaccarone, a market research and customer experience director, from Eutelsat in France, spoke about the digital revolution in empowering consumers and clients to move beyond traditional branding and PR documents to inform themselves about business and purchasing decisions.



Proactive customer experience- (#CX) and user experience (#UX) -driven communications strategies can only benefit truly customer-centric businesses, by allowing the brand to be lived fully and authentically in an omni-channel world. In the session, Claudia made use of a real-life example impacting her around her travels on the Eurostar train. A delegate in the room tweeted her comment, and a representative from Eurostar tweeted back within five minutes, asking what they could do to assist.

Similarly, while tweeting from the event, I made reference to the good #CX from @KLM, who within 10 minutes sent a direct message to thank me for the public acknowledgement of their good service. Digital has truly changed the way businesses are communicating with their various stakeholders groupings, both internally and externally.

## **Leadership communication**

The third major theme of the conference was that of leadership communication and the role CEOs and other business leaders play in cross-cultural communication and global appreciation of employee demographics.

In a conversation chaired by Anisha Jhina, director of internal communications for Mars Global Petcare, based in Belgium; Dr Barbara Gibson, a consultant, researcher and lecturer focused on intercultural communication and global business, and Dr Domna Lazidou, a UK-based consultant and academic who teaches, researches and advises on issues of culture, communication and engagement in multinational companies, spoke of their experiences in what culture means to business.

Dr Gibson's research into intercultural competencies of global CEOs discovered distinct patterns in the challenges business leaders faced when it came to intercultural interactions, and revealed a framework to help improve organisations' global competence.

At an elementary level, the panel noted the critical importance and role of communication in becoming a strategic advisor and partner to the business to ensure that leaders understood what was required of them in leading global and culturally diverse organisations. This covers everything from body language sensitivities and the way in which messages were shared, to visual communication that needs to be culturally sensitive.

The panel also noted that real conversations and collaboration now happens in smaller teams that allow business leaders to build trust and credibility in the way in which they communicate.

The importance of these topics within the African landscape will be addressed at the IABC Africa ([@IABCAfrica](#)) Regional Conference, taking place from 29 to 31 July 2015 at The Fairway Hotel and Spa in Randburg, Johannesburg. The theme for the Africa conference is leadership communication, touching on multicultural communication, strategic leadership, and the changing role of the communicator in an ever-changing global economic and geopolitical landscape.

## **ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW**

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years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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