

## “Delivering high quality communications on a tight budget in a downturn”

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Under this Government, and the next, the public sector will face growing spending restrictions and historically communications departments have been asked to shoulder more than a proportionate share of those cuts. **hanover**'s breakfast briefing with leading public sector communications experts analysed how communications can deliver 'more for less'.

### The current political climate

The Conservatives have committed to slashing all unnecessary expenditure in government departments. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has already predicted cuts of 16% outside Health and DFID budgets. Waste and non core activities in public sector bodies, campaigning and “more than administrative” quangos and Whitehall advertising are an otherwise target.

**hanover**'s breakfast briefing brought together a panel of professionals **Matt Tee**, Permanent Secretary for Government Communications; **Linda Quinn**, Director of Communications and Marketing at the Big Lottery Fund and **Donald Steel**, Head of Press at the BBC to advise public sector communications bosses how to meet the challenges.



## Integrating communications

Matt Tee predicted central government communications functions would move towards a more centralised function, integrating local public service communications into 'communications hubs' and warned of the culture change required to make that happen. All agreed that the already intensive level of scrutiny of budgets and activity would increase.

## Importance of evaluation

The panel agreed that proper evaluation of communications was critical to prove worth. Matt Tee said that a lack of evaluation in certain organisations meant policy makers were unable to see outcomes of communications projects and how they contributed to a department's objectives. Communications directors need to be more 'strategic' in their planning. It was important to take 'one step back from work and re-evaluate the end game.' Communicators needed to work alongside policy makers to educate them as to the potential contribution of good communication to the delivery of objectives.

Linda Quinn said the rise in digital media created problems in terms of traditional channels of evaluation. Donald Steel backed up this point by suggesting that the digital age encouraged stories to be recycled, resulting in less 'original journalism', including investigative journalism.

### Top Tips: Linda Quinn

1. **Tell a convincing story internally – you'll need good evaluation!**
2. **It's a crowded space so sharpen your message**
3. **Use partnerships to extend your reach**

## 'Bigger bangs for fewer bucks' – prioritising campaigns

Donald Steel and Matt Tee emphasised the importance of prioritising campaigns. Donald Steel explained how the BBC is promoting less programmes in order to have bigger campaigns charged with delivering the channel's target viewing figures, for example *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Eastenders*. All panellists agreed that Budget holders would need to stop doing some things, contrary to the current tendency to add new communication tools to the current arsenal. If we are going to be doing more digital media, what are we going to stop doing?

### Top Tips: Matt Tee

1. **'No salami slicing' – make your own cuts before others do and be prepared to stop doing some things altogether**
2. **Don't skimp on evaluation – you need the evidence to show your value and take good decisions**
3. **Do fewer, but bigger campaigns to get a bigger bang for the public buck**

## Be ahead of the game – cut before you are asked!

Matt Tee stressed the importance of communications directors thinking ahead and being realistic as to what cuts might be made in the upcoming months. They should be proactive in suggesting their own cuts and have evidence for their decisions.

## Working with partners

The Big Lottery Fund works with a mixture of established and new programmes to inform and promote Lottery good causes. This approach achieved huge reach, far beyond what their press or advertising budget could deliver.

## Retention of Talent

All three panellists agreed that there was the potential to lose talented workers during the cuts. Donald Steel suggested that wherever possible good staff should be retained, even if it meant moving them to another department.

Linda Quinn advised employing specialist social media experts. Whereas both Donald Steel and Matt Tee encouraged workers acquiring a range of skills across communications.

## Effective use of Digital Media

Matt Tee said free content is not as good as paid for content, and that “the bloggers’ sphere is a challenging place”.

Linda Quinn said smart use of social media had enabled the Lottery Fund to turn round a negative regional story by grassroots support for the actions of the distributor expressed on Facebook, Twitter and as well as more traditional media.



Donald Steel remained personally sceptical of social media, claiming that he often felt left out that he wasn't 'tweeting'! Digital media should be used when focussing on a particular audience and in the UK, print media remained fundamental for target audiences compared to the US where audiences were more disparate. BBC America's launch of *Torchwood* via Sci-Fi websites was a highly successful digital media campaign designed to reach younger, special interest audiences.

### Top Tips: Donald Steel

1. **Be more strategic – identify key aims and re-evaluate the end game**
2. **Make clever use of digital media, using it to reach specific audiences**
3. **Retain talented workers, don't lose them in the cuts**