BUILDING UP ENVIRONMENTAL CREDIBILITY
- FROM ACTION TO WORDS

Dr. Lassi Linnanen, Gaia Network Oy, Lönnrotinkatu 19 B, 00120 Helsinki, Finland.
Tel: +358-9-686 6620. Fax: +358-9-686 66210. Internet: lassi.linnanen@gaia.fi

Ms. Elina Markkanen, Gaia Network Oy

Ms. Leena Ilmola, Oy Promotiva Ltd, Helsinki, Finland

(a revised version of this paper is to be published in the forthcoming book “Greener Marketing” by Greenleaf Publishing)
1. Introduction

Several trends are shaping communication practices of those companies willing to adopt sustainable development strategies. These include, among others, the emergence of a global marketplace, the “valorization” of public discourse, the need for environmental accountability and disclosure, strong movement towards environmental management systems, as well as several forms of stakeholder and supply chain cooperation (see Frankel 1998). Generally speaking, the stakeholder milieu of environmental communication is becoming more complex. In addition, the boundaries between businesses and their stakeholders become less clear, and stakeholders will more clearly be seen as a power-base and a catalyst of innovations for businesses. Therefore, more and more profound transparency is needed to ensure the legitimacy of corporate actions.

Environmentally sound business practices and environmental achievements will lend the business and its products environmental credibility. Even though numerous companies have achieved technological and cost benefits by applying advanced environmental innovations (see e.g. von Weizsäcker 1997), there are several communication-related barriers on the way. Environmental excellence will often turn into competitive advantage only after its benefits have been communicated to customers and other stakeholders.

Environmental credibility will be earned through years of hard work. Despite companies being engaged in image-building exercises, their credibility must be based on water-tight facts even if the public are only interested in environmental results, not in the facts behind them. Seeking to gain a competitive advantage through environmental credibility is more difficult than for example using price as a marketing tool. The difficulty is aggravated by:

- emotions: each person tends to have a personal relationship to the environment;
- long chains of argumentation: environmental arguments must be thoroughly reasoned;
- rapidly changing trends: customers shift the focus of their attention unexpectedly;
- the number of stakeholders: everyone can hold himself out as an expert in
environmental matters;

- the credibility of the instance delivering the message: communication by industry is not regarded as credible;

- risks and crises: these will easily obliterate the results of years of hard work.

In this paper, we will concentrate on three central themes which shed light on the environmental communication challenge. First, we introduce the cycle of inclusion as a process to shift the stakeholder cooperation from manipulation to dialogue. Second, we analyse and conceptualise the environmental communication agenda of successful companies. Third, we focus on risk and crisis communication as one phenomenon peculiar to environmental issues. The material in the article is largely based on a bestselling Finnish textbook on environmental management and sustainable development strategies (Linnanen 1997).

2. From manipulation to dialogue - the cycle of inclusion

Public environmental debate shifts its focus swiftly and unpredictably, and businesses are constantly required to react to new concerns. Interpreting weak market signals which arise from the results of contemporary research or from initiatives of various non-governmental organisations has become more and more crucial. The trap is that at the very same time businesses should accelerate their reaction speed, the time needed for solving complex problems grows longer (Bleicher 1992).

An environmentally astute management has to deal with many different groupings with many different views. Where environmental issues have considerable weight for the activity of a business, the management is compelled to follow actively the climate of opinions. Successful cooperation with stakeholders calls for a careful analysis of the relevant markets, creation of contacts with important stakeholders, and dialogue with continued cooperation (see Figure 1).
The aim of the cycle of inclusion is to secure the ability of businesses to carry on their activities in all situations (see also Wheeler and Sillanpää 1997). This does not entail however, that businesses should seek to manipulate their stakeholders. Businesses should rather influence environmental debate in such a manner, that their own ability to do business will not be curtailed in the future. It is the businesses’ responsibility to see that all the stakeholders are provided with sufficient information on the activities of the company. At their best businesses can actively strengthen their own environmental credibility during a debate.

2.1 **Listening to markets**

By listening to markets, businesses will collect information on the aims and activities of important stakeholders, and the extent of their knowledge on the activity of the business. Building up environmental credibility requires close observation of environmental debates.
Each environmentally related topic of discussion has a life cycle of its own. The parties engaged in the discussion, the forum of discussion and the content of discussion are typical for each of the five stages. During the first, *latent stage* the environmental issue or problem will be identified. The issue will often be raised by environmental activists or researchers. The debate itself will be conducted by environmental experts in scientific publications. This stage can be recognised by analysing journals, action programmes and manifestos of environmental organisations.

During the latent period the task is to position oneself in relation to the coming issue. If the environmental issue raised could form a competitive advantage for the company, or it can quickly be developed into such, it is worth getting active already at this stage. The latent period will afford time for developing internal preparedness.

At the second, *emergence stage*, the issue to be raised, the concepts to be used and often the forum for discussion will be defined. The environmental organisations and experts of the field will take active part in this definition process. The debate will now be conducted in professional magazines and on the podia of the international congresses of the field.

To a great extent, the debate conducted at this stage will set the tone for the subsequent stages. If the subject is of central importance to the strategies and objectives of a company, there is every reason for the company to be active in initiating the debate. The purpose of communication when issues emerge is mastering the “battlefield” of discussion, that is, the subject being debated, the way of treating it, the choice of forum,
initiating and taking active part in the debate. The target groups for communication at this emergence period are the professionals of the field, and therefore the subject is to treated on professional terms.

At the third, growth stage of the environmental debate moves on to the mass media. The environmental organisations are particularly active at this stage, as the issue is given measurable targets and market-steering mechanisms are being created. If, during the earlier stages of the debate, working channels have been created vis-à-vis other main players, the focus of communication can be cast wider.

Large stakeholder groups, such as customers and consumers get interested in the subject. This is the stage for the company to cut a competitive edge and make a visible difference. Direct customer communication will be opened, informing the customers on the benefits ensuing from the company's know-how. Customer magazines, sales negotiations, brochures and fairs will function as channels of communication. The activities of the company and its products will also be introduced to the media. The use of advertising should also be considered. Should the company be exposed to an attack at this stage, it can only defend itself in a reactive way. The problem arising is that reactive communication does not help in earning environmental credibility – quite on the contrary.

At the fourth, maturity stage a vigorous debate on the content of regulations and control-mechanisms will take place. Unless the company has previously been active in the course of the debate, it will have to accept both the chosen emphasis of the debate as well as the forum where it is being conducted. Ways of wielding influence at this stage are few.

At the final, decline stage the communication will in essence be following up-kind of communication. According to the established practice, the company will report on its environmental efforts and their results, for example by making an annual environmental report. The environmental activists will have lost their interest in the subject already at the maturity stage, and at the decline stage the general public will likewise leave the matter to the care of public authorities. This does not mean, however, that an issue reaching the decline stage could not rise again.

2.2 Influencing the debate

A debate can be influenced but it cannot be manipulated. Debate does not consist of a
monologue. Active participation in a public debate means that the company itself takes part in the debate honestly and actively. Defending adamantly one's own point of view is not the best tactic during an environmental debate. Cooperation and listening to markets are liable to yield far better results.

As an expert in its own field, the company is responsible for bringing scientific data, comments of international experts and comparable statistics into the discussion. The company can also invite other experts, organisations that are thoroughly familiar with the subject, or consumers, who know about the issue to take part in the debate. If the subject is particularly important to the company, it is worth making an agenda for the discussion and cover all the areas that are liable to crop up during the discussion.

Creating contacts with the stakeholders requires motivation on both sides. The first step is to awaken the interest of the stakeholder groups. It is only when the company has got some relevant information to give to the stakeholders in the right form and at the right time that the company can count on the stakeholders wanting to spend some of their time for a contact with the company.

Should the company by itself be directly unable for the creation of stakeholder contacts, the contact can be created with the aid of partners. Cooperation with experts, a local community group or a leading professional publication can then afford an avenue for creating a contact with the stakeholders.

2.3 Ensuring dialogue

Creating a contact also creates the conditions required for fruitful, interactive communication. A successful dialogue calls for a constructive attitude from the business involved, with the setting aside of polarisations of the kind "us against them". The function of communication will extend to become more diverse than the one-dimensional, from business to stakeholders emanating communication. Instead of engaging in defensive or obstructive behaviour a business can secure its own environmental competitiveness by continuing to practice open interactiveness and cooperation. Different advisory bodies, such as the board of scientific experts, or a local community group established in the vicinity of a factory, can act as fora of cooperation. Indeed, several businesses have successfully practiced cooperation with environmental and other NGOs (Elkington 1997).

Those businesses that respond most swiftly to altered market conditions attain
considerable advantages in marketing and improving their image. Arguing one's case on purely scientific grounds only is inadvisable. Despite advances in approximating their respective viewpoints, industry and environmental organisations may still disagree on the respective weight to be attached to different matters. What is essential, however, is to learn to live in the world of diversity and unpredictable markets. Even though proactiveness always entails risk-taking, acting as a forerunner in environmental matters is not a bad strategic solution in the long run.

3. From glossy pictures to reality

Especially in cases where environmental arguments influence the purchasing decisions of customers, it pays off for businesses with strong environmental performance to invest in building up environmental credibility by means of communication. This way a new opportunity will be created for bringing innovations relating to products and manufacturing methods effectively to the market.

For purposes of building up environmental credibility the recipient of the message should be determined, that is the target group of communication should be chosen. The target group will partly determine the content of the message. When considering the message it should also be decided, whether corporate or product image be chosen as the basis of environmental marketing, and which environmental arguments should be used. After having analysed the communication strategy with respect to these factors, a practical communication plan can be made and the opportunities of exploiting environmental achievements be considered.

3.1 Choosing the target groups

In building up environmental credibility, the most important stakeholder group will often consist of customers, but several other stakeholder groups will also need information on the aims, content, plans and results connected with the environmental efforts of the company.

Communication is rendered efficient by targeting. Especially in relation to environmental matters, different stakeholder groups are interested in very different issues. All too often communication is tuned to operate in terms of the sender of the message, in other words, only those issues are dealt with which are of interest or importance to the sender. The content of the message must relate to the expectations and
attitudes of the recipient, for communication which deviates significantly from one's own attitudes will be rejected. Furthermore, the message should be tailored to the recipient's level of knowledge in order to be accepted.

Different communication media, such as the Internet, professional journals or retail advertising reach a different audience. Restricting the treatment of the subject to those areas that are of interest to the target group and speaking their language increase the probability of the message actually reaching its target.

In choosing the target group, each separate audience is worth dividing into so small target groups as possible. The more limited a target group, the more effective communication can be made. The significance of the target group to the business of the company dictates how finely the divisions should be drawn. Nevertheless, the realities of time and budget need to be taken into account when defining the sub-division of target groups.

In choosing the target groups for environmental communication, posing the following questions will prove helpful:

- Who is going to benefit from the environmental results?
- Who is interested in environmental issues at present?
- Who is in a position to influence the operational environment of the company in environmental matters?
- Who is going to be interested in the environmental matters of the company in the future or affect its operational environment?

### 3.2 Making environmental credibility part of corporate or brand image

Environmental excellence can be linked with either corporate or brand image. Building up a distinct image by means of marketing calls for investments of such magnitude, particularly on international markets, that businesses will usually be compelled to choose a strategy based either on corporate image or brand image. Building up a corporate or a brand image requires long-term commitment. Trendy solutions, aimed at catching the latest change in public mood form no part of carefully planned communication.

The following considerations affect the choice between corporate and brand images:
- Whether the company operates on consumer or business markets. On business-to-business markets corporate image is important, on consumer markets brand image is decisive.
- Which is better known at present, the company or its product?
- Which are the stages of the life cycle of a product that environmental benefits are connected with?

**Figure 3** Environmental credibility as part of corporate or brand image on the basis of the life cycle of a product

If environmental benefits are mainly achieved at the early stages of the life-cycle of a product, as is the case when emissions are cut at the production stage, the benefits are above all felt by the local community or the society at large. In these cases emphasising corporate image will usually be the best option. If, on the other hand the environmental benefits are reaped by consumers, as they relate to the qualities or use of the product, the benefits are a part of the product and can be naturally made part of the brand image.

However, it is quite possible to seek to differentiate the product even in the case of bulk goods. In the pulp and paper industry, for instance, the Swedish producer of market cellulose Södra Cell succeeded with the aid of massive marketing to create a brand out of its ozone-bleached TCF (Total Chlorine Free)-cellulose in the beginning of the 1990’s. Environmental issues are suitable for differentiation in a situation in which all competing products fulfil the other demands set to the product by consumers.
Building up corporate image cannot be neglected entirely even if a brand image-based marketing strategy is chosen. Stakeholders usually buy the company, not just the products. The special feature about using environmental arguments for marketing is that communication calls for particularly strong credibility from the sender of the message. Practicing environmental reporting is clearly a rising trend which supports the corporate image approach.

The background forces the company is associated with, such as its branch of industry also have their bearing on the credibility of the company’s environmental message. A business with a considerably greener corporate image than its branch of industry enjoys, may counter surprising opposition when attempting to highlight its own environmental achievements. It is difficult for a company to be greener than its industry. Many chemical companies, regarded in the earlier phases of the development as the worst environmental villains, are among the few large corporations to have taken on the challenge of sustainable development seriously (Hart 1997). However, they face some credibility problems due their past sins, as the intense discussion about the genetically modified food indicates.

### 3.3 Choosing persuasive environmental arguments

Communication is made effective by crystallising the chosen message and repeating it. By the “message” we mean the core information, which the sender wishes the recipient to keep in mind after the contact. It answers the question "how is the customer going to benefit from using our product or choosing us as their partner?" The message is not usually expressly stated in the marketing material; it is rather the conclusion a recipient is bound to form after having read the preliminary text or heard the sales promotion speech.

The process by which effective environmental arguments are crystallised can be divided into four different stages. The first step is to collect all possible benefits arising from the company's environmental excellence in products, services, or operations. At this stage the aim is to find as many real benefits ensuing from the operation of the company or the qualities of a product as possible.
Figure 4 The crystallisation process of environmental arguments

During the second stage the list of arguments is narrowed down by mapping out all the purchasing criteria applied by the customer upon decision making. From the list of possible arguments the strengths influencing the customer's decision are chosen. If there are several factors influencing the decision, they should be listed in order of priority. A good question to ask is: If the prices of two products are the same, which is the one chosen by the customer? Or in sifting through factors affecting corporate image: "If the prices quoted by two different companies are the same, upon which ground does the customer choose the supplier?"

Consequently, at the third stage of argument selection the environmental strengths and weaknesses of competitors are analysed and only those strengths that the competitors lack or possess in a lesser degree are allowed to remain on the list. The customer is going to choose the product or supplier, which stands out in a positive way from its competitors.

The final selection at the fourth stage takes place by choosing the most practicable arguments from the remaining shortlist. The environmentally friendly corporate or product image is built around strengths that fulfil the following criteria:

- they are of an enduring character;
• they are easily harnessed (information, for example, can be obtained directly from an environmental system);

• they are communicable (taking into account how they attract attention, how easily they are understood, the receptiveness of public opinion, the level of knowledge of the target audience).

### 3.4 Devising a communication programme

The foundation of a communication programme designed to improve environmental credibility is made up by selected corporate or product image factors. Once the benefits yielded by environmental performance have been crystallised and the messages that are of interest to the target groups have been defined, the foundation will have been established. Naturally, this should be aligned with overall corporate strategies and objectives.

In devising a communication programme, the first step is to prioritise the most important target groups. The available resources are often limited and thus the right targeting determines the efficacy of communication. Upon setting the priority order of the target groups, the following factors are worth considering:

- Who is expected to manifest the most significant change in their behaviour?
- Who is going to make the actual decisions?
- Who is going to make a decision on the basis of environmental arguments?
- Who are the opinion leaders in any particular environmental debate?
- Who will have the most decisive impact on the operational environment of the company during the planning period?

It is worth phasing the measures foreseen in the communication programme. Each phase can be allocated its key target group, which is going to be the main object of communicative attention. Likewise the content of communication can be phased according to themes, whereby one environmental component of corporate or brand image gets highlighted during a particular phase.

The communication channels and media are also worth selecting carefully. Of all the communication channels, the mass media will reach by far the widest audience. The editorial departments of media can be given information on the operation of the
business and its background, or advertising space may be bought. Marketing letters and customer magazines are ways of communicating to the customers directly. When properly employed, Internet will also be among the most effective environmental communication channels.

Personal communication is one of the best methods to use, especially if the message does not correspond to the prevailing attitudes and expectations of the recipient. The more difficult the message, the more important it is to approach the target group via opinion leaders or experts.

One of the most neglected communication channels is the local network, consisting of the employees of the company and their neighbours, relatives, and friends. The neighbouring community of the company’s production sites will also act as a communication channel akin to the local network, whose message carries much weight. To meet this challenge, early environmental reports were initially developed for employees, like the experience of Novo Nordisk and other companies show.

A third communication channel based on personal contacts is the distribution channel of the company itself, which is often neglected. Advertising, sale promotion and information can all arouse interest in a product, but the final decision to purchase will often be made only during the sales negotiations. Bearing this in mind it is important that the sales personnel be able to put the environmental achievements and the facts behind them to the customers with sufficient credibility. If the chain of communication is long, the importance of training increases in a crucial way. It is not difficult to assume, for example, that the summer salesperson of a specialty store in a small Portuguese town will not automatically be able to explain to his customer why an environmentally friendly German product is 30% more expensive than its Portuguese alternative.

### 3.5 Profiting from environmental results

The nature of communication on environmental matters differs from other types of communication in that behind each claim there must be a credible chain of argumentation and supporting material. Communication on environmental matters is based on facts. A clear trend is towards more quantitative data. Environmental management systems actually produce documents on a continuous basis which can as such be used as means or in support of communication. A printout taken from an
environmental database the very same morning negotiations take place provides more credible arguments in a sale situation than a glossy brochure covering identical issues.

The credibility environmental arguments vary in the eyes of the external stakeholder groups. Those carrying the least credibility are the various surveys and inspections carried out by the business itself. By contrast, evaluations carried out by impartial, external inspectors, or eco-labels granted according to strict criteria do act as excellent marketing arguments. The systems or labels, whose criteria have been established with the fully-fledged participation of the opinion leaders count as the most credible arguments.

Sponsoring environmental organisations and projects can at times offer a more effective and less troublesome way of signaling the company's commitment to environmental issues than advertising. Cooperation with environmental organisations is to be recommended for several reasons. It is a way of getting valuable information and expertise, which the company itself may lack. Despite full-time environmental managers or board level responsibilities, only few companies can afford to employ a broad array of functional environmental experts. In addition to expertise, cooperation with environmental organisations is going to give credibility to the environmental measures of the company. If an independent organisation lends its support to the environmental measures of the company, it is easier for the general public to have confidence in the argumentation. In the eyes of the recipient, a message will be just as reliable as its sender.

Publicity is a good means of building up environmental credibility. Companies should aim at getting positive articles and news published by the media by organising informative events, through press releases, by granting interviews, making presentations or writing articles to newspapers and magazines. The best quality about publicity is that it carries more credibility than advertising. On the other hand, compared with advertising, the problem with publicity is its uncontrollability. A well-known example of the use of public relations and sponsorship for marketing purposes instead of advertising is The Body Shop, an international retail chain selling natural cosmetics. The guiding principle of their business used to be the rejection of conventional advertising of products. This was exceptional especially in a branch such as the cosmetics industry, which is one of the industries most dependent on advertising.
4. The perishable nature of environmental credibility

Earning environmental credibility takes years, but can be lost in an instant. Despite the existence of an environmental system, accidents can happen at manufacturing sites, or a faulty product can cause a surprising environmental hazard when used. Building up environmental credibility requires realistic communication by companies that does not omit to tell about risks. Communicating risks and the company's environmental excellence create the credibility capital ensuring that an environmental crisis is not going to destroy the company's image. With the help of effective risk communication companies can minimize the damage caused by a crisis.

Internationalisation will pose companies and their environmental communication additional risks. Environmental credibility need to be earned locally, only to be lost globally. In an era of Internet communication and efficient mass media, an environmental crisis will be international news in no time, impacting on the international corporate image of the business concerned even when the effects of the crisis are of a local nature. Environmental communication must therefore succeed in operating in many different communication environments. The target is not a geographically homogenous market with shared attitudes. One of the recent example is Shell. The public row over the environmental and social effects of oil-drilling in Nigeria and its tragic culmination in the execution of nine dissidents had an impact on Shell’s image in Europe as well as in Africa. A bit earlier the wave of negative public attention towards the attempt to have the Brent Spar oil rig sunk in the Atlantic generated another movement that led to international boycott of Shell (see also Elkington 1997). These both serve as a concrete example of the global nature of environmental and social responsibility debate.

4.1 Communicating risks

Environmental credibility is earned by providing the recipients with diverse and thorough information. Environmental credibility cannot rest on positive messages solely. An exact presentation of risks coupled with a description of the measures taken by the business to minimise those risks is of interest not only to experts, but to owners, investors and financiers as well.

Accidents of a grand scale do not alone fall into the category of environmental risks. All stakeholders, especially public authorities and the distribution channel should regularly
be given up-to-date information on risk potential and issues. As the environmental responsibility of a company extends to cover the entire life-cycle of a product, logistics, distribution, the use of a product, its possible recycling and disposal all create their own risks. With regard to reputation it is not the point who is formally responsible for the emergence of a crisis. The crucial issue is the product or the company with which the problem is associated.

Figure 5 Building blocks of environmental credibility

Provided that a company has established a working communication relation with its most important stakeholders, one of the most important issues to be discussed is risk. The risks connected with a manufacturing site, the security systems designed to prevent them and the measures to be taken once an accident has taken place all need to be discussed with the local community. One of the tasks of scientific staff will be commenting on the risk analysis of the company and assessing the effectiveness of preventative measures. The group of environmental activists will be asked to give their views on the nature of risks and their prevention.

Communicating risks can be perceived as too demanding, or establishing a direct line of communication with the stakeholders can be seen as difficult and liable to prejudice the competitiveness of a company. In these cases communication on risks can be delegated to an organisation looking after the interests of the industry in general or to an external group of experts.

In addition to their other benefits, environmental reports provide a convenient communication framework for dealing with risks. For example, London Electricity chose the risks connected with the dissolution of chemicals from its cable network into
the soil as the theme of its 1995 annual environmental report. This unconventional choice received plenty of positive publicity in England, and the report was awarded the Deloitte & Touche Award for environmental reporting.

4.2 Crisis communication

Preparing for environmental crises requires not only an existing action programme for restricting the crisis and minimising its effects, but a detailed communication plan also. The credibility of a company will be decided on the basis of crisis communication, as news on an environmental disaster will spread around the world in an hour's time.

It is possible to get prepared for environmental crises only after the possible risks have been identified and the most likely crises defined. A crisis can concern raw-materials, manufacturing processes, new products, distribution chains or the storage, use, recycling or disposal of a product. It is typical of environmental crises that mistakes made in the company’s past will resurface.

The need for preparation for an environmental crisis is determined by the likelihood of it taking place and the gravity of its possible effects. In order to estimate the preventative measures required, it is worth making a scenario of the worst situation possible, the limitation and communication of which is a complete failure.

Having pictured the worst situation possible, the dangers of the most likely crises can be assessed. When making decisions on investments in crisis prevention, it is advisable to compare the cost of those investments with the costs of repairing the damage caused to the brand or the corporate image by a crisis, or with the costs generated by a tightened regulatory framework brought about as a result of a crisis.
Preparing efficiently for a crisis calls for good directions on crisis communication and action. All the key persons should be made thoroughly familiar with the directions. Where possible, the crisis directions should be made together with key personnel, thus ensuring their commitment and capacity to handle the crisis and apply the right principles on communication.

Regardless of a crisis, a company must be able to carry on its normal business. Towards this end it is important, that a special task force for crisis control be named, who will assume sole responsibility for the handling of the crisis. The rest of the organisation can thus continue its activities as usual.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks for crisis communication are data communication
connections. In a typical crisis situation telephone lines are blocked by inquiries from the surrounding community and customers, directors are beyond reach at the place of accident, and the media cannot be effectively informed, as there are no telefax numbers at hand. The crisis task force therefore need their own internal telephones and lines that enable them to make telephone calls outside at all times. In addition there must be the facility of leaving a recorded message in an answering machine, answering the consumers' most pressing concerns. Furthermore it is vital that the register of the company's stakeholders be always kept up to date and available for use.

Crisis communication is the acid test of a company's credibility. In an accident situation each employee of the company will be regarded as an expert and a source of information by the media, whether this is desired or not. It is therefore important that personnel, such as telephone central, secretariat, sales personnel and porters, who may come in contact with the stakeholders, be given training on how to respond to questions and direct inquiries.

Information has to be passed swiftly in a crisis situation, and it must be exact and correct. Effective crisis communication will be brought to naught if data on raw-materials, quality control of the manufacturing process or the testing of products is only collected once the crisis has emerged.

For certain crucial crisis situations all employees will be provided with their own guidelines in cooperation with experts. The same experts can also be called to give statements and assessments in a crisis situation.

Crisis communication does not end with the crisis. After the news on the accident itself, the crisis may make headlines again in connection with coming into grips with the consequences of the crisis. In case the crisis was negligently dealt with, court decisions will once again bring attention to issues damaging to the company's environmental credibility.
Table 1 Ten Golden Rules of Crisis Communication

1 Build up environmental credibility and working stakeholder connections in advance.

2 Be prepared for a crisis and give your employees training on how to communicate in a crisis.

3 Always inform on risks. This will create credibility and take the sting out of criticism if a crisis occurs.

4 Once a crisis has taken place, admit immediately if you do not know what has happened and how. Say that the matter is being investigated and tell when you are going to give more information.

5 Accept full responsibility for what has happened. Do not blame your organisation or the circumstances.

6 Do not belittle the situation, if the stakeholders see it in a more serious light than you do.

7 Be sensitive: if the situation is serious, tell about your own feelings too.

8 Tell exactly what is being and will be done in order to prevent the crisis from reoccurring.

9 Be prepared for a backlash of public attention.

10 Analyse the crisis and the communication measures afterwards; improve your guidelines.
5. Conclusions

Earning environmental credibility is not a peacemeal approach. While communication and rhetoric cannot substitute for the many and different substantive ways of producing knowledge, neither can those substantive methods substitute rhetoric. However, there are only a few companies who have excelled in environmental argumentation. Environmental communication tends still to be more tactical ad hoc responses than strategic brand building. Integrated approach is needed in the situation where different industries, countries and stakeholders are involved. The public concern is gradually shifting towards not only environmental but also social degradation, which does not make the complex issue any easier.

According to our analysis, characteristics for successful environmental communication are

- long-term commitment
- fact-based information which is of enduring character and easily communicable
- the crystallisation of message
- willingness to communicate risks, not only positive aspects
- two-way interaction with stakeholders.

Perhaps proponents of corporate environmentalism should learn from direct marketing, which has proved an affective way of convincing people. The main point in direct marketing is repetition. People tend to rationalise and simplify messages they receive, which requires, on the sender side, an ability to put messages in a compact form which nevertheless gives the right impression.

The discovery of ecological problems has been based on a wide, anticipatory scientific study. Even though environmental information is technically within the reach of many people in this world of Internet and mass media, we also need to further the kind of environmental awareness that influences attitudes and consumer behaviour, in order for the fact-based argumentation to fall on fertile soil.
6. References


