

SmartNews Corporate Communications Study Findings

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Deconstructing Jargon: The Quest for Authenticity in Corporate Messaging

- A majority of respondents (**90%**) question the sincerity of company statements at least some of the time, with **31%** of them usually questioning it, and **15%** always questioning it.
- **86%** of people believe there are phrases used by companies that are overused or seem inauthentic in communication.
- A plurality of respondents (**36%**) find company statements overly scripted or PR-driven, suggesting a perception of inauthenticity in corporate messaging.
- There are specific phrases that seem to grind peoples' gears most, indicating a general lack of trust or belief in the authenticity of such expressions.
 - "This lawsuit has no merit" is seen as the least authentic phrase, followed by "(Company X) is a game-changer for the industry" and then "We're the leading provider in (industry)."
 - "We are committed to resolving this issue" is seen as the most authentic phrase, followed by "We recognize the importance of this issue" and then "This is a learning opportunity for us."

The Risks of "No Comment": How Company Communications Shape Public Perception

- Respondents were most leery of companies that issue a "no comment" statement. A majority of respondents (**56%**) perceive a company's refusal to comment as a strategy to protect themselves rather than an admission of guilt, with **27%** assuming some sort of guilt. The practice of saying "no comment" has long been controversial and these results show that Americans view the practice through a negative lens.
- **70%** of respondents reported learning about negative issues because a company issued a statement, with **43%** stating they would not have known if the company had not spoken out, and **27%** saying that hearing about it from the company first made them more sympathetic to the company's position. Here too, the practice of whether to proactively address a potentially negative issue has been hotly debated inside of companies. These results indicate that companies may reap greater reputational benefits by being strategically reactive when handling controversial issues.

Decoding Credibility: Where Audiences Trust Company Communications

- The majority of people encounter official communications from companies most often through news articles (**54%**) or the company's own social media platforms (**51%**).
 - **32%** of people most often see official communications in press releases, and the lowest amount (**20%**) encounter these communications in company blogs.
- Company statements presented in news articles are seen as the most credible, with **81%** of people finding them at least somewhat credible. This is very closely followed by statements presented in press releases, at **78%**.
 - Company statements presented on their own social media channels are seen as slightly less credible, with **69%** considering them at least somewhat credible.
 - Company blogs are next, with **66%** finding them at least credible to some degree.
 - Communications through other people's social media are perceived as much less credible, with **19%** considering them not credible at all.



Voices of Authority: Trust Dynamics in Corporate Communication

- CEOs are viewed as the most trustworthy spokesperson for crises involving security (**49%**) and safety (**47%**), while CFOs are most trusted for financial issues (**56%**). This highlights the public's expectation of leadership accountability in specific crisis scenarios.

Methodology

- This survey aimed to gather public opinions on corporate communications tactics across the U.S.
 - N = 1,066
 - MOE = +/- 3.1%
 - Weighted to U.S. general population
 - Fielded between January 16 - 19, 2025