

Issues Watch

The global financial downturn has changed issues management. Organisations are reprioritising, refocusing and reassessing in order to guarantee their futures and capitalise on opportunities. This change can also be seen in the global media, which has reacted to this landscape and crucially, to consumer mood. From our analysis of reporting in key global publications, the Issues Tracker shows just how dramatic this change has been. Reporting on climate change spiked last summer when world leaders agreed a “shared vision” during a G8 summit in Japan – only to plummet 76% between July and August. This was a direct consequence of a media agenda usurped by financial meltdown – an agenda driven by issues such as government aid, economic nationalism, and increased visibility of financing options such as Public Private Partnerships.

It is not just the external issues environment that is changing: the internal operating environment has changed too. Employees are among the most important stakeholders for any organisation. Layoffs and the shortage of vacancies for new school leavers and graduates have dominated the media agenda across Western Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific this year. However, our research shows that media agendas differ subtly across regions reflecting development and difference between markets and cultures. Pay issues are most widely reported in the Middle East and malpractice features in European coverage, but only nominally in Asia Pacific.

As organisations have been working to adjust to this new media agenda, a new issue exploded on to the map: swine flu. The

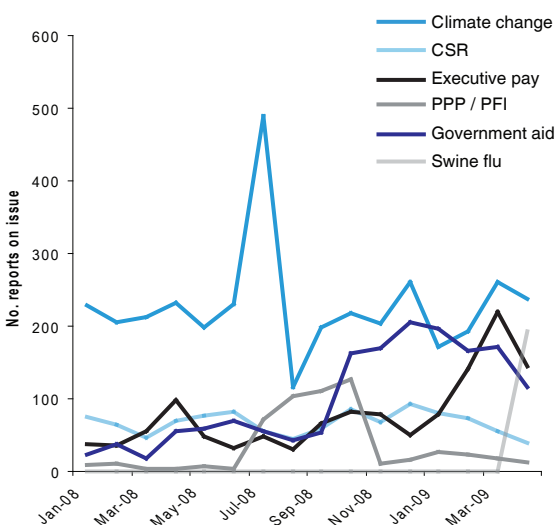
Issues Tracker shows the newsworthiness of swine flu: in one month, the number of reports on every other issue on the Tracker dropped. Although this is a new issue in itself, bird flu is not, and so pandemic influenza should have been on every organisation’s issues radar.

Another popular debate has been how the downturn will affect corporate citizenship. Many commentators suggest that interest in corporate citizenship will drop, but our research suggests this hasn’t been the case. Media reports on corporate citizenship have remained constant, reflecting some recent announcements, such as Mars and Cadbury making major commitments to sustainable cocoa production. Although organisation’s budgets for CSR are coming under increasing pressure, our research shows that journalists and the public still want to know what social and environmental activities organisations are undertaking.

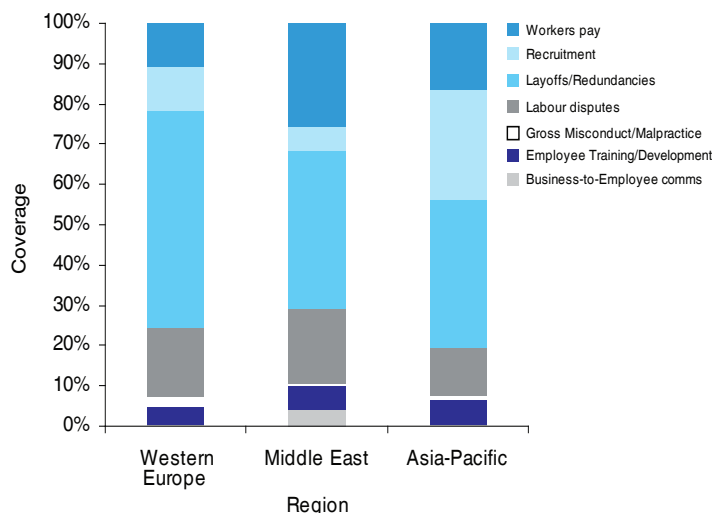
RL Analyst, Jonathan Howie, says: “Good corporate citizenship is not only ethically laudable, but should also make business sense. RL’s Issues Tracker indicates that corporate citizenship still features on international media agendas despite the downturn and this will continue as long as it continues to meet ethical and financial objectives.”

We will be keeping a close eye on these trends as the protracted economic recovery continues to shape the issues landscape. How will this landscape change over the coming months? What issues will influence the global news agenda? And what can we learn from these trends? The next edition of Issues Watch will investigate.

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Internal issues in the media, ytd



I wish I hadn't done that

... A White House aide lost his job after a misjudged presidential photo exercise in New York. The US presidential jet (without the President) and fighter plane were flown at a low-level over Manhattan, New York, **creating panic on the ground** and resulting in the evacuation of a number of office buildings. The exercise had been co-ordinated with city and state authorities, but a decision was made not to notify the public. An organisation can have all the good process and protocol in place, but every decision should consider context and timing, with reputation in the front of mind.

... It might have been the charisma dust left behind by US President, Barack Obama's, visit to the UK or it could simply have been the excitement of using YouTube, but what possessed the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to deliver a broadcast message so out-of-character remains a mystery. Downing Street **uploaded a video** of Mr Brown announcing changes to UK MP's expenses in which he spontaneously breaks into smiles more at home in Hollywood. Even for simple media messages, it's important to consider any potential distractions which will detract from the message – something the Prime Minister again fell foul of when speaking at a classroom which happened to have a World War 2 display on the walls – Swastikas and all.

... And finally... Coca-Cola's 'think global, act local' mantra took a knock after a controversial advertising campaign in Australia featuring actress Kerry Armstrong. The company's campaign aimed to redress the balance of debate on the nutritional value of Coca-Cola by 'busting myths' that it makes you fat, rots your teeth and is packed with caffeine. But the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission took a dim view, saying that the ads had the potential to mislead consumers and forced Coca-Cola to publish corrective advertisements in newspapers across the country. This is one example from many that shows there is no longer such a thing as a 'local issue' for international organisations: activity on one side of the world has the potential to reach, and affect, operations on the other. As the Sydney Morning Herald summarised: "The cost to Coke? It's fee to Kerry Armstrong – about AU\$70,000. The corrective ads – AU\$200,000. And its reputation – priceless."

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