

Rebuilding Trust:

Rebuilding Credibility in the
Newsroom and Boardroom

Eleventh Annual Survey of the Media
with Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism



A study by Euro RSCG Magnet with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Rebuilding Trust

Can credibility be rebuilt in the newsroom and the boardroom?

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Introduction

For the past 11 years, Euro RSCG Magnet, in partnership with Steven S. Ross, associate professor at Columbia University, has undertaken studies examining how news events, technology, and a changing economic climate affect journalistic reporting practices. Formerly known as the Middleberg/Ross studies, these surveys have been by far the largest and most comprehensive available on journalists' responses to cultural, technological and economic forces. This year marks the first time international journalists were invited to participate in the study.

We first expanded the survey to include corporate ethics and credibility in 2002. In those studies, we learned that reports of corporate misdeeds—and scandalous behavior by individual executives—were influencing corporate coverage and changing some long-held views about which sources were most important and most credible to journalists. In 2005, we widened the focus to examine the ways in which scandals involving journalists themselves affect coverage and behavior within the newsroom. With reports covering not only corporate wrongdoing, but also news of journalistic lapses in credibility breaking on what seemed a daily basis, we realized that the media is facing challenges both from without and within. In this year's study, we posed new questions about how media scandals have influenced reporting, fact-checking, and sourcing practices, as well as how journalists are working to repair their credibility. Finally, in response to the rapidly growing influence of Weblogs, we asked reporters to weigh in on the future of the blogosphere, their relationship with the new medium, and whether it has changed their reporting practices over the past year.

These surveys have been highly successful because of the ongoing support of Professor Ross, who is now consulting, editing Broadband Properties magazine and teaching business reporting at Harvard. We thank him for his 11 years of continued support without which these surveys could not have been produced.

This year we are dedicating our study to Peter Jennings. By upholding to the highest standards of ethics in journalism, he built trust for the entire industry. He will be missed but his contributions will be felt in the future generations of reporters.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reporters are Struggling to Define the Role of Blogs in Journalism

In light of the explosive growth of blogging over the past year, this year's study included a series of questions aimed at ascertaining journalists' views on the new medium, its credibility and the relationship between traditional journalism and the so-called "citizen reporters." The findings paint a rather vivid picture of journalists' ambivalence about blogs, illustrating reporters' love-hate relationship with a medium they find themselves relying on for story ideas and reference, but which they do not believe is credible. More than half of journalists, 51 percent, use Weblogs. This percentage is markedly higher than that of adults in general; a recent Pew study found that only about 10 percent of American adults have read a blog, indicating that journalists have embraced the medium far more quickly than their non-journalist counterparts. Of those journalists who use blogs, 70 percent do so for work-related purposes. Additionally, 53 percent of journalist blog-users visit Weblogs in order to find story ideas, while 42 percent do so for research and reference and 36 percent do so to find sources for their stories. Fully 28 percent of reporters note that they often or sometimes rely on blogs in their day-to-day reporting, while 16 percent often or sometimes use information from blogs in their routine stories.

"The most useful thing is not so much the quality of the reporting with blogs but that they use the internet for what it is best at - that is linking up back through sources. So that if you are coming up with a story, and don't necessarily believe the spin you've been given, you can normally find your way back to where it originated."

-Dan Roberts
Financial Times



While these findings appear to herald the growing influence of blogs, closer scrutiny reveals journalists' conflicting attitudes about this new medium. At the same time that journalists are using blogs to inform their reporting, they also admit that they do not trust them. Indeed, only one percent of journalists believe that Weblogs are very credible sources of information and only three percent say that they are very likely to inform their views. Blogs are also increasingly seen by journalists as just another advertising outlet for corporations, with 68 percent noting that over the next year blogs will become a more popular corporate tool for reaching consumers. Additionally, only 22 percent of reporters say that Weblogs will become valuable journalistic tools, while 56 percent say that blogs will remain independent and "unorthodox" means of disseminating information - startling findings, when we consider the fact that so many journalists admit to using blogs for story ideas, reference, and locating sources. When asked about their views on the future of Weblogs, journalists appear split between whether blogging will alter the new landscape in a positive way (33 percent) or a negative one (35 percent). On the other hand, 60 percent point to disclosures of non-government or corporate payments to independent bloggers as having a very strong or strong effect on the credibility of the media, suggesting that journalists really do see bloggers as a part of the mainstream media - whether they admit it or not.

These findings point to the fact that journalists are still struggling to define the role that blogs will play in the changing media landscape. They also suggest that journalists are aware of the potential changes they themselves face, as "participatory journalism" becomes more accepted and even expected by readers. At the same time, reporters may be wondering if blogging will prove to be yet another flash in the virtual pan, similar to online chats or message boards. While journalists cannot admit to trusting the information that blogs provide, they are still turning to this online tool in significant numbers, suggesting that journalists are cautious of bloggers and may

be reluctant to acknowledge Weblogs as a legitimate source of information until the medium evolves further.

Corporate Scandals Continue to Thwart Credibility

Journalists' trust in corporations has continued to decline over the last year, with nearly half of reporters noting that they have less trust now than they did 12 months ago. Reporters point to key areas where corporations can build trust and improve their standing in the media, agreeing that corporate transparency in times of crisis and candidness about tough issues in particular still leave a lot to be desired. Indeed, 76 percent of reporters see corporations performing poorly in terms of their candidness, while 66 percent say the same about transparency. Much of this mistrust can be traced back to the fact that journalists simply do not believe that corporations are being honest with them – or their customers. Fewer than 15 percent of journalists say that corporations are honest with the media.

The effects of this dissipating trust can be seen as journalists increasingly turn their confidence to independent, third-party sources in order to inform their perceptions of the companies they cover. Industry experts, industry analysts, academics, consumers, and readers rank as the top five sources used to inform media understanding, suggesting that journalists who cover companies are taking strides to keep their objectivity intact as their trust in corporations declines. Corporate spokespeople, in fact, rank 10th, edging out only anonymous sources and Weblogs, which rank in last place with only 9 percent of journalists who cover companies viewing Weblogs as very credible sources. Indeed, when it comes to credibility, journalists point to independent sources as the most trustworthy, likely due to their lack of corporate affiliation. Fully two-thirds of reporters view academic sources as very credible, while 65 percent believe that industry experts are very trustworthy and half have high regard for the credibility of industry analysts. These top three sources are the most trusted by far; only 33 percent of journalists believe the fourth most reliable

source, NGOs, are very credible. Twenty-two percent regard CEOs and other executives in the same manner, ranking the C-suite below trade associations, consumers and the government – and suggesting that C-level individuals still have a long way to go in gaining media trust.

This reliance on independent sources bleeds into other areas of reporting as well; for the second year in a row, media rank academics and the government among the top three sources they turn to for information or commentary on a routine basis, while industry experts, a new option this year, took first place. Surprisingly, readers, which ranked third in 2003, dropped to eighth place in this year's study. This may be due to the fact that media are becoming more and more wary of sources in general, as well as more conscientious about fact-checking, both of which are driving the increased reliance on independent sources. In other words, it is not likely that consumers have decreased their influence on the media; rather, it may be that third parties have *increased* their impact.

These results, compared with data for the last two years, suggest two things: not only do corporations have a growing need to lift the veil off communications, but third-party sources are increasingly stepping in and filling the communications gap left by overly opaque companies. As such, corporations are continuing to lose their voice and credibility to independent experts in regard to their own activities, policies and products – an area on which they should be most qualified to speak accurately, and are allowing the opportunity for improving and broadening their trust within the media to slip away.

Everyday Business Practices Impact Media Standing

As we found last year, corporate misbehavior continues to have a definitive effect on how a company is covered by the media. Of those journalists who regularly cover companies, fully 93 percent say that ethical corporate governance – or lack thereof – is very important in improving or diminishing a company's standing in the media. Additionally, 85 percent note that positive treatment

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of employees has a powerful effect on improving a company's coverage, while 88 percent say that negative treatment would strongly diminish coverage. For all intents and purposes, corporate unethical behavior deeply affects coverage of all types, not only that with a financial and corporate focus but product coverage as well. Indeed, 75 percent of journalists who regularly cover companies say that such misbehavior often or sometimes affects their financial and corporate coverage, while 56 percent assert the same about coverage focusing on products. Journalists are not solely concerned with corporate unethical behavior, however. Personal unscrupulous activity on the part of corporate executives impacts coverage as well. Indeed, 58 percent of reporters note that personal unethical behavior often or sometimes affects financial or corporate coverage.

In light of the scandals monopolizing headlines over the past several years, journalists' strong reaction to ethical corporate governance and unethical personal and professional behavior is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is journalists' relatively low regard to stance on ethical practices outside of the company. In fact, a company's active stance on environmental sustainability and its frequent corporate philanthropy projects ranks as least likely to improve a company's standing in the media, at 67 percent and 59 percent respectively. Even more unexpected is the fact that, while positive strides in social responsibility are somewhat likely to positively affect coverage, negative strides are quite unlikely to negatively affect coverage.

"There is a growing distrust of whoever is the designated flack, and that traces back to the Clinton administration in the early 90's and early 90's politics – very tightly packaged messages, controlled from a spin cycle war room."

*Garrett Graff,
Fishbowl DC*



Indeed, only 35 percent of reporters note that lack of corporate philanthropy would be an important factor in diminishing standing in the media, while 53 percent say the same about inactivity in terms of environmental sustainability.

In an era of increased competition and ever-savvier consumers, journalists are taking note that customer satisfaction, innovation and trendsetter status have a profound effect on a company's ongoing financial health, and thus, on the tone and tenor of its standing in the media. In fact, 92 percent of journalists who regularly cover companies note that high levels of consumer satisfaction, loyalty and popularity will go a long way toward improving a company's media standing, while 90 percent agree that low levels will have the opposite effect. Eighty percent say the same about positive financial health and its effects on positive standing, while 85 percent say that status as an industry trendsetter can only help a company and 77 percent have similar opinions about frequent product innovation.

These findings suggest that the combination of ethical business operations and continued striving toward innovation and new product development are integral to building their companies' reputations in the media, by virtue of the fact that company success is highly dependent on those efforts. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that companies that try to hide lapses in corporate credibility with philanthropy or good deeds, or overemphasize corporate responsibility at the expense of trustworthy business practices, may be sabotaging their own attempts to improve corporate reputation. Media are applying these actions mostly in relation to how they affect the company itself, and to a lesser extent their positive impact on society, when deciding how to cover a company and what elements to emphasize in their stories. For example, Apple Computers receives regular and highly positive coverage from journalists that focuses on its innovative iPod products, extreme popularity and staunch loyalty among customers, and its strong investment in new product development. Notably, the company topped journalists' list of media favorites in 2003. At the same time, articles about the company's philanthropic practices and social commitment – practices including

donating millions of dollars' worth of equipment and employee time to schools and student mentoring programs – have gone comparatively unnoticed by those very same journalists.

Corporate and Product Reputations are Intertwined

Journalists are looking to the products – and consumers themselves – when reporting on a company. Journalists who regularly cover companies appear to identify a company with its product or service and consumer commitment, to the point where coverage of both may be becoming increasingly intertwined. When it comes to company reporting, the top three most important attributes for journalists are product performance and quality (89 percent), customer satisfaction and loyalty (79 percent), and product innovation (79 percent). In almost equal measure, these same three attributes rank as the most important qualities for product reporting, at 90 percent, 82 percent and 81 percent respectively. These findings continue to build on our previous research, driving home the notion that a company's reputation is only as strong as its best product – and its happiest customer.

CEOs are Regaining Stature

Despite frequent coverage of CEO scandals and unethical behavior, CEOs themselves appear to be regaining some stature among journalists. In fact, 73 percent of journalists note that they use information or commentary from CEOs in their routine stories, placing the source squarely in fourth place in terms of most relied-upon sources – up from ninth place in 2003. CEOs were also ranked the sixth most likely source to inform journalists' views, up from ninth in 2003. While CEOs' stature is on the rise, journalists do not appear to be ready to trust them fully quite yet. Indeed, only 22 percent of journalists viewed them as very credible sources. What this suggests is that corporate credibility in and of itself may be in the very early stages of starting to mend as journalists become increasingly inured to stories of scandals and malfeasance and

begin to look for stories portraying companies in a more positive light. It may also mean that CEOs themselves are taking steps to shore up their credibility, and the media are beginning to notice their efforts.

Media Scandals Challenge Media Trust, But Commitment to Ethical Reporting Practices Remains Strong

A series of revelations involving the credibility of the media itself have also led journalists to take a deeper look at themselves and their own colleagues, forcing reporters to be more careful about who they trust – and how they report their stories. The findings suggest that journalists are taking these credibility threats to heart: a stunning 93 percent of journalists note that they are excruciatingly careful about fact checking their stories, up from 59 percent in 2003. Even as journalists are shoring up their own reporting practices, however, they are losing trust in their peers. Forty five percent of those surveyed admit that they are less trusting of the professional behavior of their colleagues, up from 34 percent just a year and a half ago, in 2003. When it comes to the types scandals that are expected to have the strongest effect on media credibility in the coming year, journalists assert that disclosures of government payments to journalists to act as spokespeople (79 percent) and scandals involving forged documents (78 percent) delivered the biggest blow, placing Armstrong Williams and Rathergate squarely at the top of the list of the year's most damaging media developments. As a result, 93 percent of journalists agree that they are less trusting of paid journalists as spokespeople than they were in the past.

Interestingly, questions about anonymous sources – including the recent headlines involving Judith Miller of the *New York Times* and Matthew Cooper of *Time* – have had little effect on journalists' day-to-day reporting or on their trust of their peers. Indeed, only 21 percent of media note that they are fearful of being penalized for using anonymous sources in their stories, while only 41 percent say that the recent controversy surrounding anonymous sources will have an effect on media credibility in the coming year.

Forty five percent of those surveyed admit that they are less trusting of the professional behavior of their colleagues, up from 34 percent just a year and a half ago, in 2003.

These findings, coupled with journalists' continued and growing reliance on independent sources in their reporting, suggest that a new era of increased journalistic rigor and more-stringent, self-imposed reporting practices will work to increase media credibility in the coming years.

"As a profession, we need to take a long hard look at ourselves. In fact, it's only because of the internet that the Jayson Blair scandal was exposed. Jayson Blair and Jack Kelly of USA today are not exactly modern phenomenon. There have always been plagiarists and fabricators in the media. It's just that they are more easy to identify because of the internet. It's good that we have this debate internally; it will allow those organizations that take journalism seriously to survive and hopefully, prosper."

*-Paul Holmes
Reuters*



Jayson Blair appearing on CNN

METHODOLOGY

(Please note: A full report of the methodology and sampling is available upon request from Professor Ross at ssr3@columbia.edu or editorsteve@gmail.com)

This study was fielded using a split survey approach and was distributed to a list of approximately 25,000 business, health, technology, political, science, and consumer reporters in all North American, European, EMEA, APAC, and Central/South American media compiled by Bacon's Media Map. We collected 1,202 usable responses (600 and 602 in each of the two panels) between April 28 and May 11, 2005 using International Communications Research's Web-based survey tool.

Some questions were posed to the entire list. But many questions were posed to only one of the two panels. The number of responses to each question is listed as each is discussed in the report.

DETAILED FINDINGS: CREDIBILITY, ETHICS, INFLUENCE AND SOURCES

Corporate Trust

Several years' worth of corporate malfeasance has taken its toll on media trust, with journalists increasingly eschewing the corporate line for independent sources when writing their stories. Despite high-profile convictions of unscrupulous CEOs, such as Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco and Bernard Ebbers of WorldCom, journalists remain unconvinced that corporations have cleaned up their acts and committed themselves to rebuilding credibility. In fact, fifty-one percent of reporters admit that they have little to no trust in corporations, while 49 percent assert that their trust in corporations has declined over the last year.

Figure 1 "How much trust do you have in corporations today?"
(n=594)

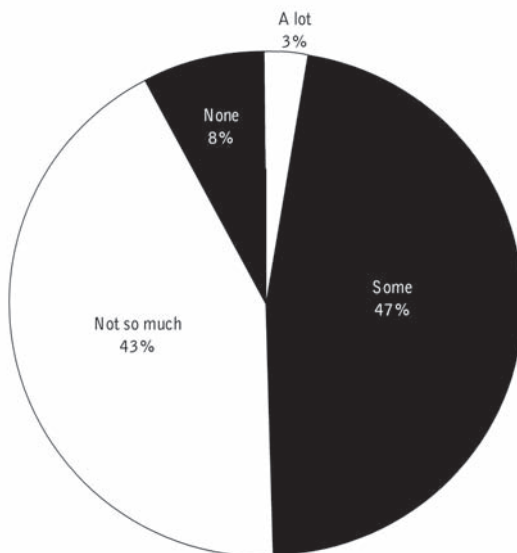
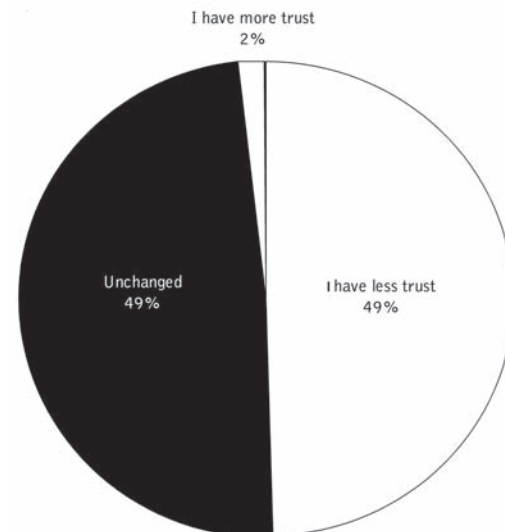


Figure 2 "How has your trust in corporations changed in the past year?"
(n=590)



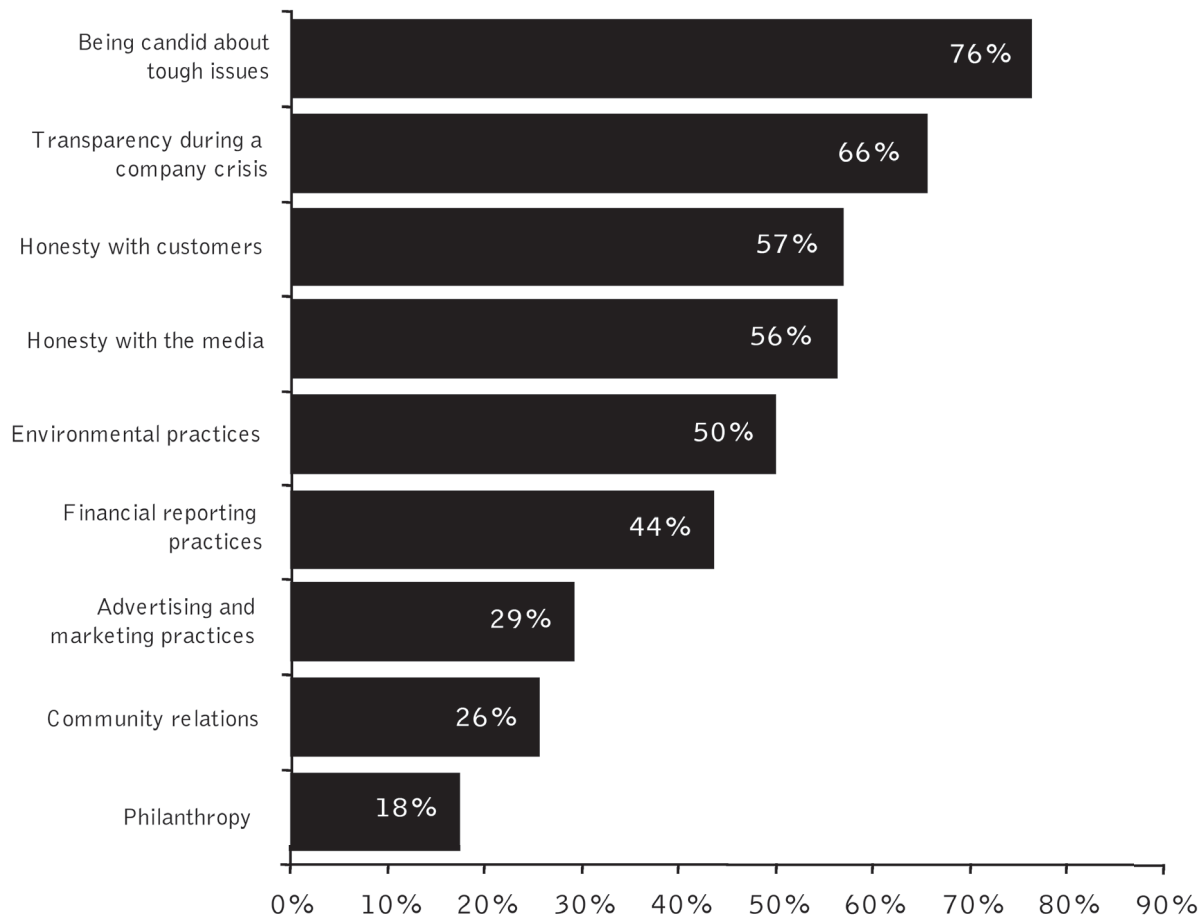
The reason why journalists are losing trust in corporations is simple: journalists do not believe that corporations are being honest with them, nor do they believe information is being communicated effectively. Fully 76 percent of journalists believe that corporations are performing poorly or very poorly in terms of being candid about tough issues affecting the company (Figure 3). Two-thirds also believe that companies are doing a lackluster job at maintaining transparency during a company crisis, while more than half of reporters believe that corporations have a problem with honesty in general – 57 percent believe companies do poorly when it comes to being honest with consumers, while 56 percent say the same about honesty with the media. This stands in direct opposition to traditional communications counsel, which advises increasing communications during a crisis, and suggests why companies have such difficulty

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regaining credibility after a crisis. Indeed, companies' mishandling of crises from a communications standpoint may have damaged their reputations beyond the actual damage caused by the crises themselves.

These issues show no signs of abating in the coming year; to the contrary, the corporate-media disconnect appears to be widening. For example, a notable loss in the pursuit to bring more honesty to corporate communications occurred in May 2005 when two Fortune 500 companies – Morgan Stanley and BP – issued announcements stating that they would pull all advertising from news publications that published any “objectionable” stories about them. BP also went one step further, demanding that ad-accepting publications inform them in advance of any planned publishing of news text or visuals directly mentioning the company, a competitor or its industry. Similarly, in April 2005 General Motors pulled its ads from the *Los Angeles Times* due to negative coverage. With so many media outlets dependent on advertising revenue to keep their publications afloat, these developments may have a profound impact on the way in which corporate news is reported – and may also affect the way journalists view the companies they are tasked to cover.

Figure 3 “How do you see corporations performing in the following communications areas?” Very poorly or poorly
(n>540)



This year, findings suggest that the personal behavior of CEOs and other corporate executives continue to have as profound effects as ever on the media coverage their companies receive, as the impact of their personal behavior on corporate or product coverage has remained nearly identical to 2003 findings. Of journalists who cover companies, 58 percent note that their financial or corporate coverage is often or sometimes affected by revelations of personal unethical behavior on the part of senior management (Figure 4), while 54 percent said so in 2003 (Figure 8).

Despite this moderate growth, the findings are still markedly lower than those of 2002, when 64 percent of journalists noted that personal unethical behavior strongly affected corporate or financial behavior. This is likely due to the fact that, after the continuing parade of CEO scandals and improprieties which first shocked the media in 2002, reporters have become inured to such goings-on and are focusing on other issues in their stories. Indeed, stories such as that of Harry Stonecipher, who was ousted as CEO of Boeing following the discovery of his extramarital affair with a subordinate employee, have failed to generate the same firestorm of stories and commentary as before.

This notion is further supported by the fact that only 34 percent of journalists note that disclosures of personal unethical behavior on the part of CEOs or other C-level executives affect product coverage in a notable way, similar to the 35 percent that reported so in 2003 (Figure 9). Both represent a notable decrease from 2002, when 42 percent of journalists who cover companies said the same.

Figure 4 "Please indicate how often disclosures of personal unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to financial or corporate coverage."
(n=876)

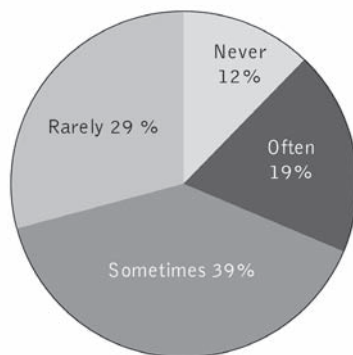
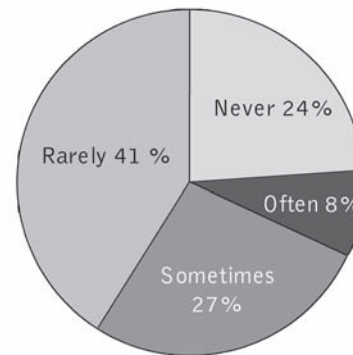


Figure 5 "Please indicate how often disclosures of personal unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to product coverage."
(n=916)



At the same time, corporate unethical behavior is having a much stronger effect on coverage than ever before. Journalists may recognize that a CEO's personal foibles might not affect his or her corporate leadership capabilities, but they also increasingly recognize that revelations of unethical behavior in the corporate realm have a much greater impact on a company's financial health, and thus have a definite place in coverage. Seventy-five percent of journalists who cover companies note that corporate unethical behavior will often or sometimes affect financial or corporate coverage, compared to the same percentage last year. However, this year's findings indicate that reporters allow such revelations to affect coverage more frequently than in 2003, with 43 percent of reporters who cover companies asserting that such revelations will affect financial or corporate coverage often, compared with 37 percent in 2003 (Figure 10).

Interestingly, disclosures of how corporate unethical behavior affect product coverage today vary little from 2003, with 56 percent now reporting that product coverage is often or sometimes affected, compared with 57 percent in 2003. Perhaps journalists are starting to recognize that corporate malfeasance may not necessarily affect the quality of a product, or, more likely, the initial shock of corporate lapses in ethics, whose effects were felt most dramatically in 2002, has begun to wear off for journalists, making corporate scandal just business as usual.

Figure 6 "Please indicate how often disclosures of corporate unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to financial or corporate coverage."
(n=865)

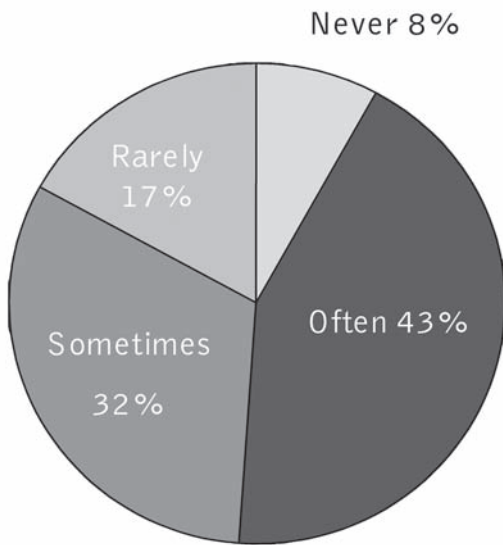


Figure 7 "Please indicate how often disclosures of corporate unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to product coverage."
(n=904)

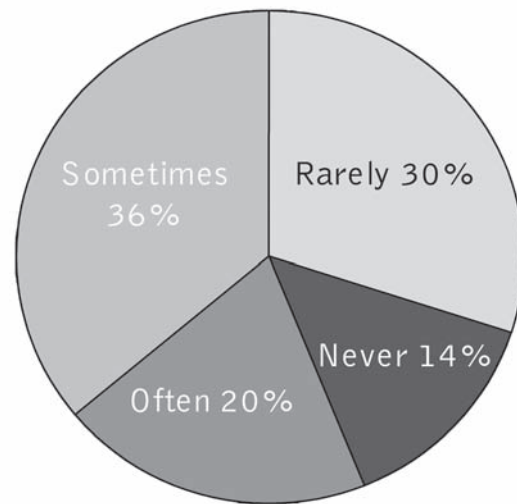


Figure 8 "Please indicate how often disclosures of personal unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to financial or corporate coverage."
2005 vs. 2003 and 2002

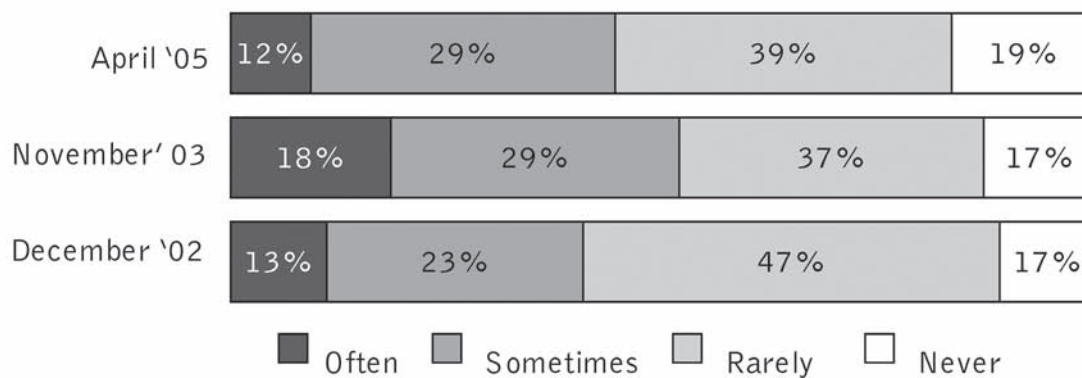


Figure 9 "Please indicate how often disclosures of personal unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to product coverage." 2005 vs. 2003 and 2003

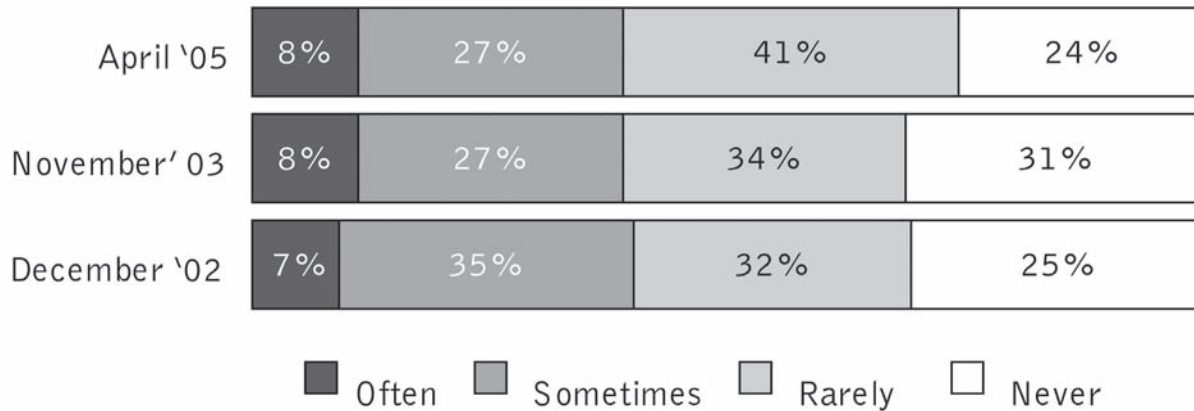


Figure 10 "Please indicate how often disclosures of corporate unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to financial or corporate coverage." 2005 vs. 2003 and 2002

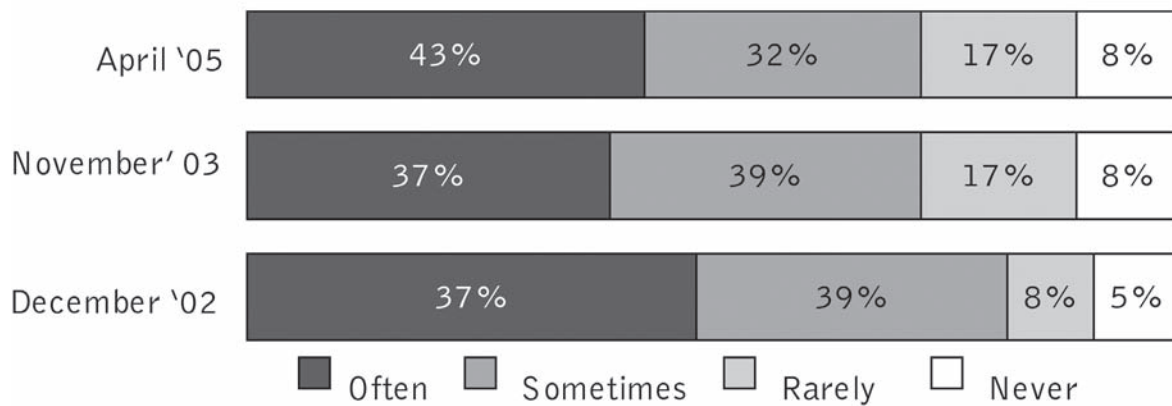
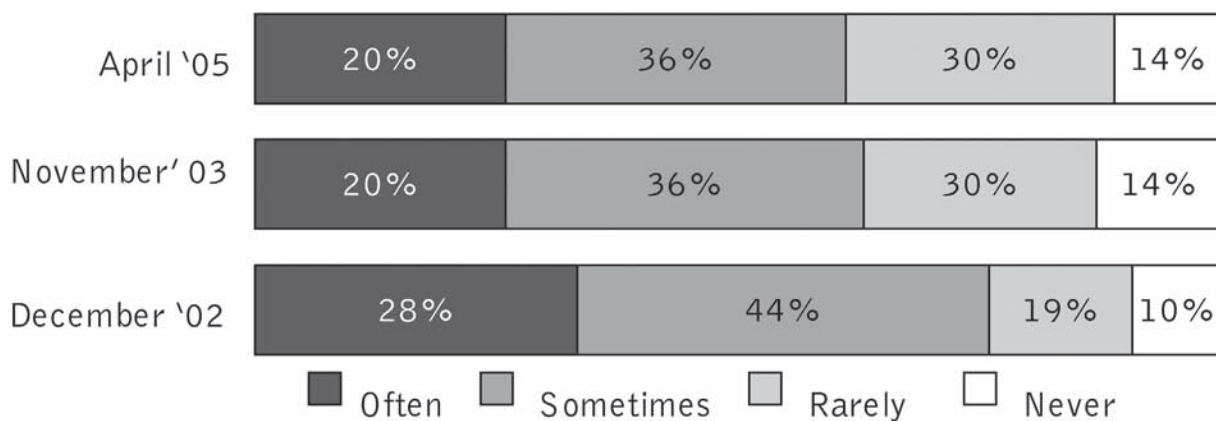


Figure 11 "Please indicate how often disclosures of corporate unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives affect your coverage of their companies when it comes to product coverage." 2005 vs. 2003 and 2003



SOURCES AND CREDIBILITY

Poor corporate communications practices such as those mentioned in Figure 3 have taken their toll on source credibility, as journalists admit that they simply do not trust corporate executives or spokespeople to provide them with credible and accurate information. Journalists have their own credibility at stake – a credibility that is increasingly threatened by scandals rocking their own industry – and as such are relying on independent sources with much greater frequency than corporate ones, likely to ensure that they are getting the straight story. Indeed, our study found that independent sources are considered the most credible, by far, of any sources used by journalists – and, accordingly, among the most frequently used.

However, it also appears as if journalists' need for instant information may trump the perceived credibility of sources. It is true that fully two-thirds of respondents report finding academics very credible sources, while 65 percent strongly trust the credibility of industry experts and half find industry analysts highly trustworthy (Figure 12). Accordingly, 93 percent often or sometimes use information from industry experts in their stories, while 86 percent use facts from academics in their reporting (Figure 13). However, the government and corporate spokespeople – two sources ranking quite low in terms of perceived credibility – rank very highly as sources journalists turn to frequently, at 80 percent and 74 percent, respectively. The reason for this can likely be traced back to the fast-paced atmosphere of the newsroom, and the fact that these sources are often the most readily available to reporters who need information as quickly as possible.

Interestingly, CEOs also rank quite highly in terms of journalists' most frequent sources, at 73 percent, and moved up to the fourth most used source (ranked only by the term "often") from ninth place in 2003 (Table 1), suggesting that even though CEOs are not widely trusted, they are increasingly valuable sources in the fast-paced world of journalism. **Indeed, journalists seem torn between the sources who can bring them the most credible information, and those who have the information most readily available.** This ambivalence can be seen in other areas of journalistic reporting practices as well. For example, newswires and online news publications, defined by their regular updates and most up-to-the-minute information, rate as among the most frequently used sources for journalists in their day-to-day reporting (Figure 15). These sources are extremely valuable to reporters, who have to meet tight deadlines on a daily basis, in that they are easy to access and can be consulted in an instant. However, the same attributes that make newswires and online publications so valuable are also liabilities. Up-to-the-minute news feeds can often carry initial reporting errors that must be fixed in later updates, leading to the possibility that the errors will be repeated in other mainstream media outlets and foster disillusionment or distrust among those who use newswires and newsfeeds to inform their reporting.

At the same time, CEOs' importance as sources may be increasing for other reasons as well. Rampant corporate scandals have brought new laws and aggressive regulators, and have perhaps prompted boards of directors to act sooner rather than later in dealing with problem CEOs. This increased scrutiny is inducing more CEOs to leave voluntarily –potentially increasing the credibility of those who have survived in this scrutinizing corporate climate.

Figure 12 "How credible do you consider the following sources?" Very credible (n>538)

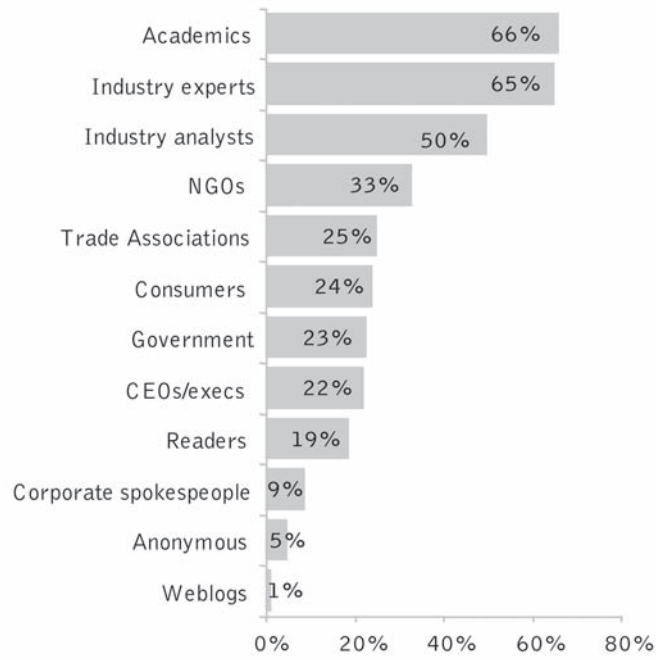
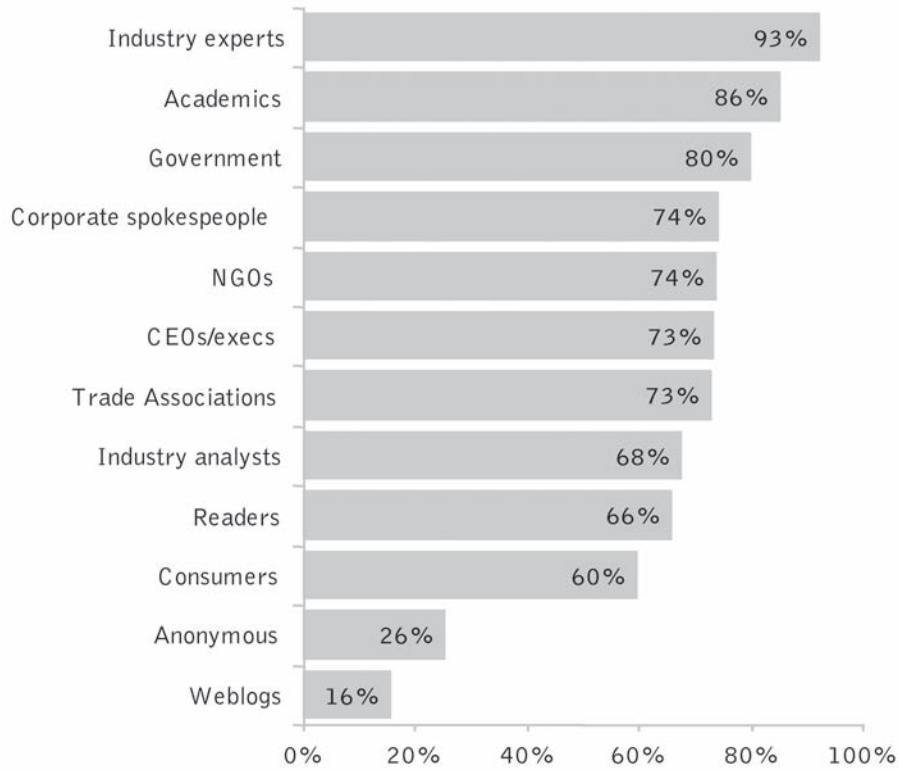


Figure 13 "How frequently do you use information, statistics or commentary from any of the following sources in your routine stories?" Often or sometimes (n>594)



Consumers and readers plummeted this year in terms of their importance as sources to journalists. This may be due to the fact that media are becoming more and more wary of sources in general, as well as more conscientious about fact-checking. Both of these factors are likely driving the increased reliance on independent sources. In other words, it isn't so much that the influence of consumers on the media has decreased – it's more that the influence of third parties has increased.

Table 1: Frequency of use of sources, 2005 vs. 2003, 2002

Ranked by "very likely"	APR '05	NOV '03	DEC '02
Industry Experts	1	NR	NR
Industry Analysts	2	2	5
Academics	3	1	6
CEOs	4	9	4
Corporate Spokespeople	5	5	2
Industry Analysts	6	10	7
Trade Associations	7	7	3
Readers	8	3	12
Consumers	9	6	10
NGOs	10		8
Weblogs	11	NR	NR
Anonymous	12	NR	NR

Independent sources are continuing to emerge as the most influential sources for journalists, as the findings indicate that not only are industry experts, industry analysts and academics the most frequent and trusted touchstones for journalists, they are also the top three sources to inform perception. It is surprising, however, that their power to inform perceptions is still so low (Figure 14). It would seem that the media's personal opinions and perceptions are what they are, and that they are difficult to affect that in a major way.

Consumers and readers also fell from their perch atop the influence chain, in which they both ranked second in 2003, moving down to fourth and fifth place, respectively. Industry analysts, on the other hand, climbed to second place from fifth in 2003, while CEOs went from ninth place last year to sixth place in this year's study (Table 2). Though their ability to influence reporters' views is still relatively low, these changes signify a slight shift toward the ability of established industry experts and insiders to hold some sway over media perceptions.

Figure 14 "How likely are each of the following to inform your view or perception of a company, business event or industry?"
Very likely or likely
(n>564)



Table 3 Likeliness of a source to inform views and perceptions, 2005 vs. 2003, 2002

Ranked by "very likely"	APR '05	NOV '03	DEC '02
Industry Experts	1	NR	NR
Industry Analysts	2	5	3
Academics	3	1	1
Consumers	4	2	NR
Readers	5	2	NR
CEOs	6	9	NR
NGOs	7	8	7
Trade Associations	8	6	6
Government	9	10	4
Corporate Spokespeople	10	13	8
Anonymous	11	NR	NR
Weblogs	12	NR	NR

Media Influencers

We asked reporters and media personnel to tell us which broadcast, print and online news outlets were the most useful in day-to-day reporting, as well as which individuals, government sources and organizations provided the greatest wealth of trustworthy information. We found that journalists continue to value rapidity in their reporting; indeed, when it comes to finding and reporting on the news, the fast-paced nature of journalism trumps all. As was the case last year, journalists today are turning to outlets with the most up-to-date news rather than waiting for more in-depth, but less frequently updated, reporting. Newswires are once again the sources most likely to be used in day-to-day reporting (Figure 15), at 72 percent, while 67 percent rely on regional daily publications (up from 58 percent in 2003).

Most interestingly, online news sites grew dramatically in importance, with 64 percent of journalists reporting that they often or sometimes use Web news in their day-to-day reporting, up from 34 percent in 2003, while national daily publications fell to fourth place from its second place perch last year. Though national dailies have not lost

their relevance and usefulness for reporters, with 63 percent using them often or sometimes in 2005 and the same percentage doing so in 2003, other sources have become just as important to journalists' reporting. This suggests that reporters are increasingly taking advantage of the wealth of up-to-the-minute information at their fingertips -- and they are turning to more and more news sources to enhance their stories. This increasing reliance on online sources suggests that journalists, pressured by deadlines and other factors, may be forced by the challenges of their profession to sacrifice accuracy in their stories for immediacy of information. Indeed, the instantaneous nature of online publishing means that story errors and numerous revisions and updates are the norm, making it altogether possible that journalists are often drawing their articles, sources and research from faulty information.

Figure 15 "How frequently do you rely on the following online, print and broadcast news sources in your day-to-day reporting/editing?" often or sometimes (n=599)

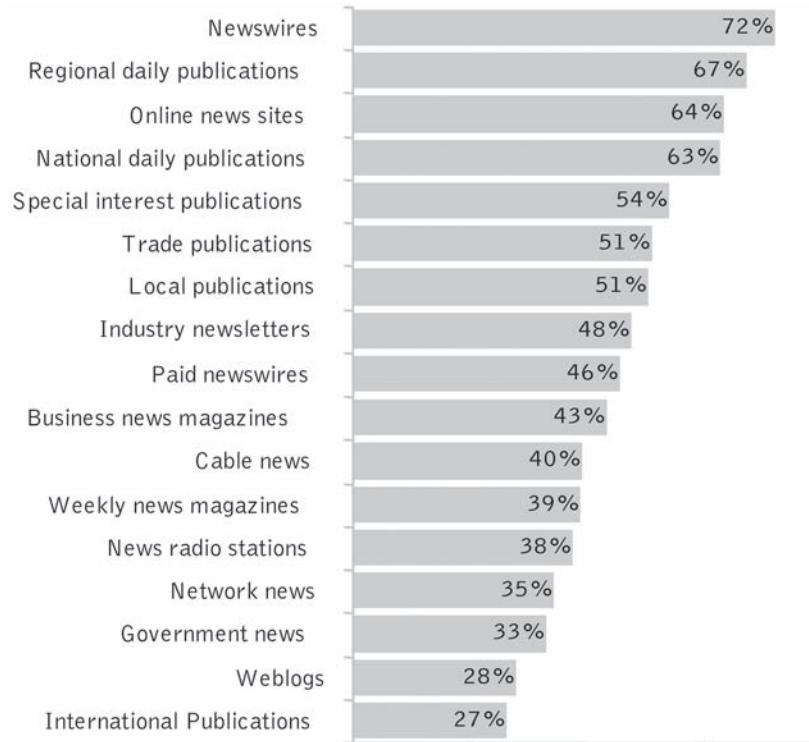


Table 3 Likely to be used in day-to-day reporting, 2005 vs. 2003

Ranked by "often, sometimes"		
News wires	1	1
Regional daily Publications	2	3
Online news sites	3	8
National daily publications	4	2
Special interest publications	5	12
Local publications	6	5
Trade-specific publications	7	4
Industry newsletters	8	9
Paid news wires	9	6
Business news magazines	10	14
Cable news	11	10
News radio stations	12	11
Weekly news magazines	13	7
Network news	14	13
Government news	15	15
Weblogs	16	16
International publications	17	17

While we've found that journalists are giving more weight to CEOs than they did last year, and that CEOs are more likely to inform reporters' views, it is interesting to note that CEOs rank the same this year as they did in 2003 with regard to their importance in reporting on a company overall (Table 4). Corporate leadership has also not budged from its seventh place rank. Indeed, the rankings of each attribute's importance in overall company reporting have scarcely changed in the past year. This is likely due to the fact that the overall corporate landscape has remained mostly the same during that time period, with scandals and corporate malfeasance showing few signs of abating and corporate health continuing to depend strongly on continued customer loyalty. When it comes to reporting on a company's overall health, in fact, journalists who cover companies have agreed over the past two years that the customer is king. Product performance and quality, innovation and client commitment retain the top three spots, while financial and technological performance swapped places, at fourth and fifth, respectively. Corporate social responsibility retained its low 10th place ranking, with only 44 percent of journalists who cover companies noting it as an important or very important attribute, while fewer still rely on their own personal experience, at 41 percent -- demonstrating a journalistic commitment to impartiality and ethical reporting.

It is interesting to note that financial performance ranked only in fourth place in terms of importance when reporting on a company overall; one would expect a company's financial health to be of paramount importance. Yet a mere 70 percent of journalists who cover companies note that the sales, profits and revenues of a corporation are very important or important to overall company reporting, begging the question of why the other 30 percent of reporters don't seem to place a high value on corporate financials. Part of this may be due to the fact that journalists have simply come to expect that corporations' published financials may not be entirely correct, even for seemingly innocuous brands – as in the recent case of doughnut giant Krispy Kreme, which was found to have intentionally misstated its financials to hide declining sales and profits. More likely, the relatively low importance of financial performance may be due to the fact that journalists understand the fact that a company is only as strong as its products. A company with a commitment to high quality products, constant innovation, and maintaining its customer base will likely realize a strong financial performance, and thus this causal link may mean that financials are simply not as important.

At the same time, corporations are working to rebuild their credibility. Stricter financial reporting guidelines such as Sarbanes-Oxley have forced companies to go to greater lengths to ensure fiscal honesty, and have had the added effect of improving companies' perceived trustworthiness in the media. Despite these measures, journalistic distrust of corporations has been building through several years' worth of ethical lapses, and this mistrust, while ostensibly declining, may still take quite some time to overcome completely.

Figure 16 "How important are the following attributes when reporting on a company overall?" Very important or important (n>523)

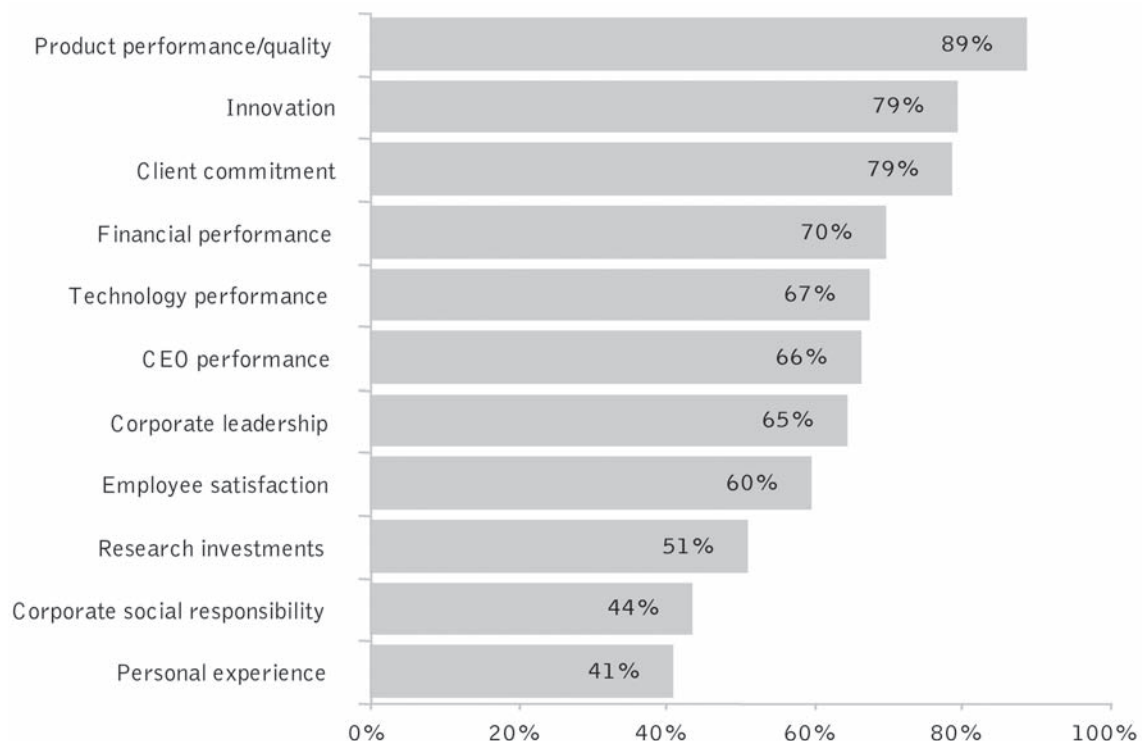


Table 4 Importance in reporting on a company overall, 2005 vs. 2003

Ranked by "very important"	APR '05	NOV '03
Product performance & quality	1	1
Client commitment	2	2
Innovation	3	3
Financial performance	4	5
Technology performance	5	4
CEO's performance and leadership	6	6
Corporate leadership (not CEO)	7	7
Employee satisfaction	8	8
Research investments	9	12
Corporate responsibility	10	10
Personal experience	11	11

Understandably, when it comes to reporting on a company's product or service, journalists who cover companies overwhelmingly look to product performance and quality. Client commitment and innovation once again take the next two slots in the top three, as journalists likely know that a product or service that is not innovative or does not have committed customers is likely one not worth covering (Figure 17). A noteworthy development, however, is the fact that CEO performance and leadership jumped to fifth place in terms of importance from 11th place in 2003 (Table 5), while financial performance moved from ninth to sixth place and corporate leadership moved from 12th to seventh place. The rankings for attribute importance for product reporting are evolving to be more in line with those of overall company reporting, suggesting a shift in the way journalists view the companies they cover – increasingly identifying a company and its product as one and the same.

Figure 17 "How important are the following attributes when reporting on a company's product or service?" Very important or important (n>530)



Table 5 Importance in reporting on a company's product or service, 2005 vs. 2003

Ranked by "very likely"	APR '05	NOV '03
Product performance and quality	1	1
Client commitment	2	3
Innovation	3	2
Technology performance	4	4
CEO's performance and leadership	5	11
Financial performance	6	9
Corporate leadership (not including CEO)	7	12
Employee satisfaction and culture	8	8
Research investments	9	6
Personal experience	10	7
Corporate responsibility	11	10

Southwest Airlines is an oft-cited example of a company whose coverage has been fairly consistently favorable – while their peers have all undergone image problems due to the embattled airline industry.

This year's study findings suggest that years of corporate ethics scandals have heightened journalists' antennae with regard to a company's business practices. Indeed, ethical lapses have dominated headlines for so long that companies are often lauded in media coverage simply for following a principled business plan. Southwest Airlines is an oft-cited example of a company whose coverage has been fairly consistently favorable – while their peers have all undergone image problems due to the embattled airline industry. Quite likely the company's continued financial success as well as its deep commitment to running a customer-friendly business and positive treatment of employees has kept coverage very favorable.

Accordingly, ethics and credibility figure very highly into a company's standing in the media, as 93 percent of journalists point to ethical corporate governance as very important or important in this regard. Similarly, customer satisfaction is integral to a company's media standing, with 92 percent noting its importance (Figure 18).

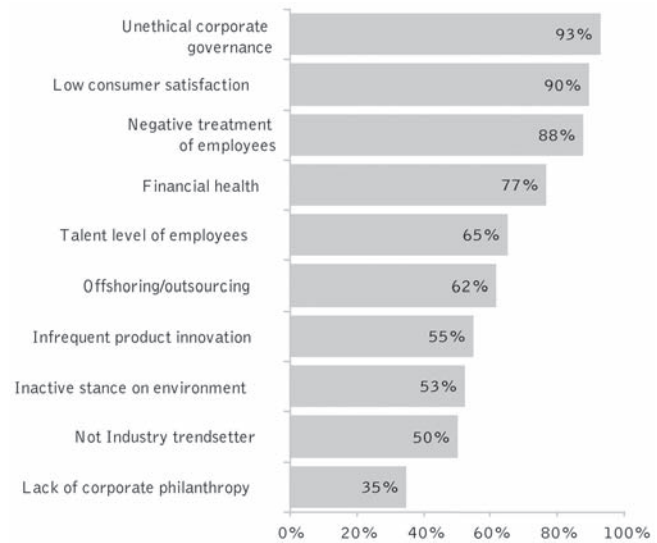


With a few exceptions the business attributes that will improve a company's standing in the media the most are the very same ones that, when performed poorly, will have the strongest effect on diminishing their media standing. However, these criteria do not go as far in diminishing media standings as they do in improving them. A company's status as an industry trendsetter is one notable example; 85 percent of journalists agree that trendsetter status is very important or important to media standings, while only 50 percent note that a company's lack of trendsetting will detract from media standing (Figure 19). Similarly, while 59 percent of journalists note that corporate philanthropy helps a company in the media, only 35 percent say that a lack of corporate philanthropy will hurt them, suggesting that in and of itself, corporate social responsibility can do little to improve a company's reputation if business practices are unethical or not in the best interests of the customer. It appears that a company's negative business practices have much less of an impact on its media standings than its positive ones do. This may be due to the fact that so many journalists and readers have become numb to stories of corporate misbehavior over the past few years, and are looking to emphasize the positive.

Figure 18 “In your opinion, how important are each of the following business-related attributes in improving a company’s standing in the media?” Very important or important (n>589)



Figure 19 “In your opinion, how important are each of the following business-related attributes in diminishing a company’s standing in the media?” Very important or important (n>582)

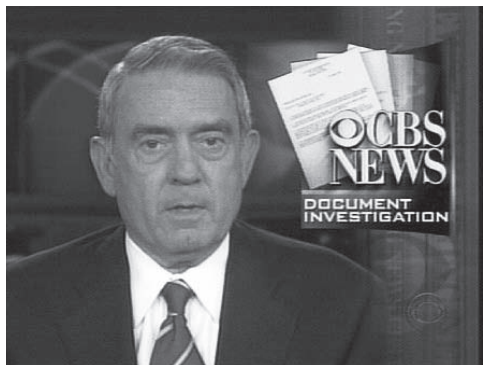


Media Credibility

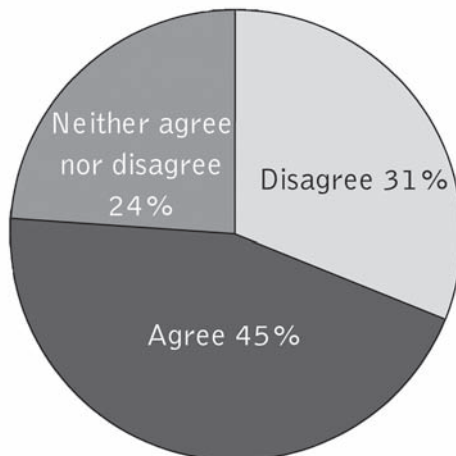
While journalists are turning to frequently updated news sources to help them keep up with the fast-paced news industry, they are careful to note that they are more committed than ever to ensuring the credibility of their stories. Recent high-profile media scandals such as Rathergate have continued to rock the industry, creating a crisis of trust similar to the one facing corporations. In addition, journalists have increasingly come under fire for their use of anonymous sources in breaking or controversial stories, most recently Michael Isikoff and *Newsweek* for publishing a story about the mistreatment and torture tactics of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers. The media community is not sitting back and allowing the wave of mistrust to overtake them, however. Rather, they show a strong commitment to maintaining – and repairing – their credibility.

Indeed, journalistic practices seem to be pointing to a rebound in credibility, not only for corporations, but for journalists as well. Fully 93 percent of journalists agree that they are excruciatingly careful about fact-checking their stories, a statement that only 59 percent agreed with in 2003 (Figure 20). While journalists are vigilant in policing their own work, however, they are less sure of their peers’ commitment to doing the same. In fact, recent media scandals have taken a notable toll on journalists’ trust of each other. Trust in colleagues has declined significantly over the last year and a half, with 45 percent of journalists noting that they currently have less trust in the professional behavior of their peers, compared with 34 percent in 2003 (Figure 21). These findings suggest that journalists are beginning to employ their own series of stricter guidelines and regulations on themselves and the way in which they view their colleagues’ stories and reporting practices – in effect creating a self-imposed, journalistic version of corporations’ Sarbanes-Oxley requirements.

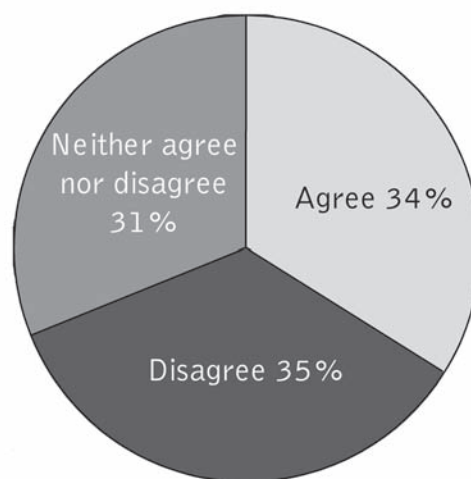
Figure 21 "I am less trusting of the professional behavior of my colleagues"
(2005 n=592)



Recent high-profile media scandals such as Rathergate have continued to rock the industry, creating a crisis of trust similar to the one facing corporations. The media community is not sitting back and allowing the wave of mistrust to overtake them, however. Rather, they show a strong commitment to maintaining – and repairing – their credibility.

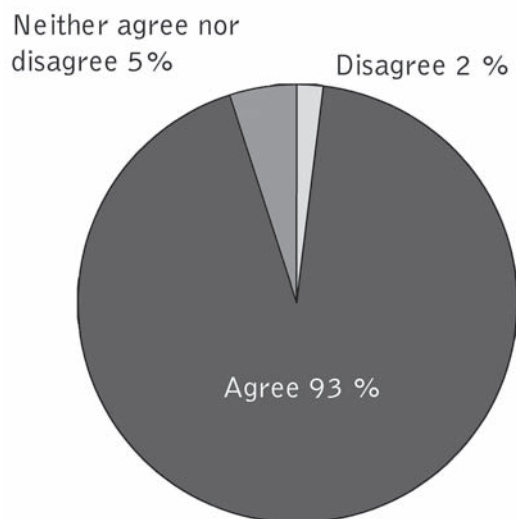


April 2005

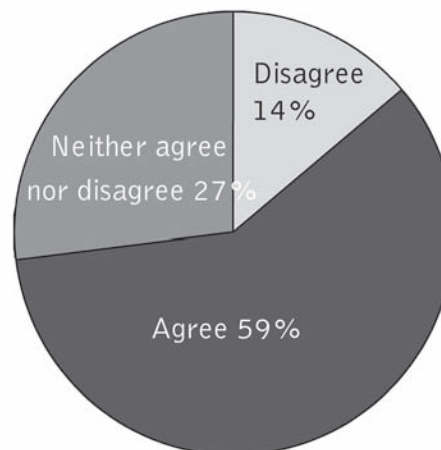


November 2003

Figure 20 "I am excruciatingly careful about fact checking my stories"
(2005 n =599)



April 2005



November 2003

Of all the breaches in media credibility that have occurred over the last year, journalists believe that Rathergate and revelations about Armstrong Williams and other journalists will have the most lasting effects on media integrity. Fully 79 percent of journalists strongly agree or agree that disclosures of journalists acting as paid spokespeople will have a strong effect on media credibility in the coming year, while 78 percent say the same about revelations involving forged documents (Figure 23). Interestingly, the findings indicate that recent controversies about journalists Judith Miller and Matthew Cooper facing jail time for refusing to reveal their anonymous sources have not affected the media in a major way. Only 21 percent of reporters agree that they were fearful of being penalized for using anonymous sources (Figure 22), while only 41 percent note that they felt issues surrounding anonymous sources would have a strong effect on media credibility over the next 12 months. It remains to be seen whether Ms. Miller’s subsequent sentencing to four months in prison and Matthew Cooper’s agreement to testify may yet have stronger effects on journalists. Similarly, reporters’ concerns over less recent reporting scandals, including that of Jayson Blair, appear to have faded as time has passed, with only 23 percent of journalists professing fear of being accused of embellishing their stories (Figure 22).

Figure 22 Journalists’ attitudes towards ethics in the newsroom (n>591)

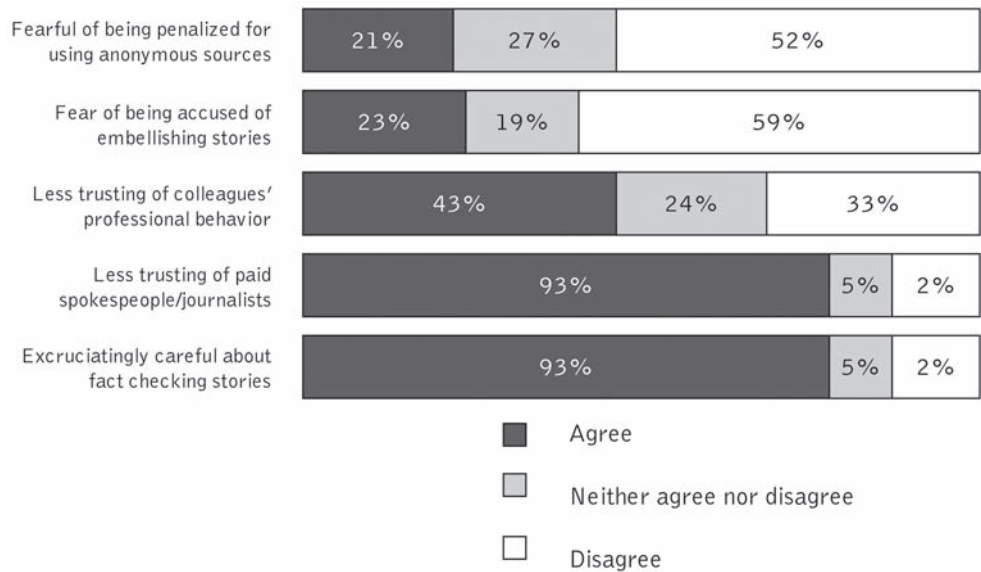
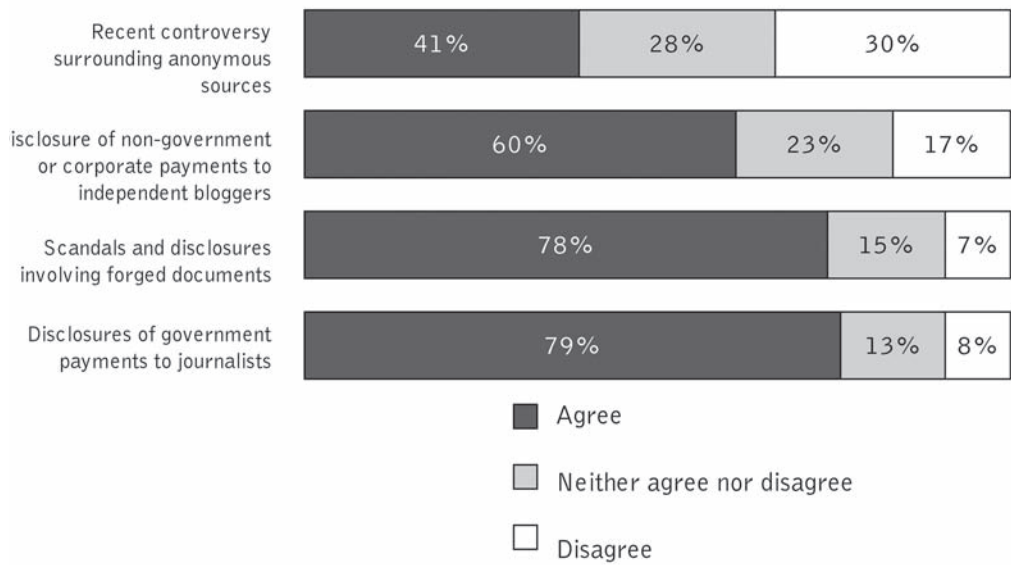


Figure 23 “What effects do you think the following developments will have on the credibility of the media in the coming year (including on-line, print and broadcast media)?” (n>558)



Reporting in Times of Crisis

Even in times of extreme crisis or breaking news, journalists are still relatively open to media outreach strategies. PR campaigns can provide ready information for time-starved journalists to use in their reporting.

With the increasingly global landscape and the ever-faster spread of information, journalists find themselves racing against the clock in times of crisis more than ever before. Both major corporate and humanitarian crises are unique in that they often take center stage within the media, co-opting front pages, magazine covers, and broadcast news leads for relatively long periods of time while shunting everyday news stories to the back burner. Recent tragedies such as the subway bombings in London or the tsunami in Asia have proven to be just such events, while corporate and media crises such as the ongoing executive exodus at Morgan Stanley or the jailing of Judith Miller for refusing to reveal anonymous sources have also received a great deal of sustained media coverage in recent months.

In light of these headline-grabbing crises and scandals, we asked journalists how their duties and reporting responsibilities change during trying times. What we found was not entirely surprising: 59 percent of journalists note some kind of change in their daily duties (Figure 24), ranging from remaining on one's beat but covering the breaking news as it relates to their area of expertise to being reassigned from their everyday beat to cover breaking news. Interestingly, only 6 percent devote less of their time to PR campaigns and press releases devoted to their beat. This suggests that even in times of extreme crisis or breaking news, journalists are still relatively open to media outreach strategies – most likely due to the extreme time-crunch that extenuating circumstances can impose on an already pressed-for-time industry, and the fact that PR campaigns can provide ready information for time-starved journalists to use in their reporting.

Figure 24 "How do your daily duties change in the face of major world news stories or tragedies?" (n=597)

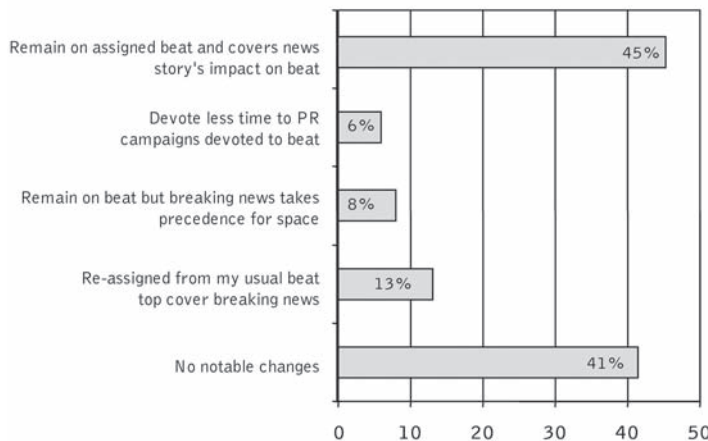


Figure 25 "In the event of a crisis or major event, which three of the following sources would be most essential to your reporting?" (n=597)



At the same time, journalists are most likely to rely on independent sources in times of crisis, with two-thirds turning to industry experts and 43 percent turning to industry analysts (Figure 25), a preference which makes sense because of journalists' need for information as soon as possible in times of crisis, as well as sophisticated analysis of the future ramifications of the breaking news and a wealth of expertise on the subject at hand, something which independent experts possess in abundance.

International journalists, sources and trust

While North American reporters and their international counterparts agree on many of their reporting practices and ethical concerns, they do differ markedly when it comes to their attitudes towards sources and their level of trust for corporations, readers, consumers and independents. On the whole, international journalists seem to possess a higher level of trust in corporations, independent experts – and even each other. When it comes to sources and day-to-day reporting, for example, international journalists rely on a much wider range of publications for their news and story ideas than do North American journalists.

The study's findings reveal that international journalists are much more likely to "often" or "sometimes" rely on online news sites, at 72 percent compared to 62 percent for North American journalists. One possible reason for international journalists reliance on online news sites can be explained by the fact that they are more embracing of all news sources in general, from industry newsletters (54 percent of international journalists, compared with 47 percent of North American journalists), to government news (41 percent compared to 32 percent, respectively).

Interestingly, international publications rank very low among North American journalists as a news source for day-to-day reporting and editing, with only one-quarter relying on international publications in their day-to-day reporting, while at the same time, 42 percent of international journalists rely on these sources regularly. This finding can

potentially be attributed to the fact that international journalists – particularly those in Europe – find themselves residing in much closer proximity to the borders other nations, and thus find themselves more affected by breaking news or crises in neighboring countries. In light of this, it is in international journalists' best interests to report on news influencing the international community.

The only two news sources upon which International journalists were less likely to rely than their North American counterparts were cable news (29 percent compared to 41 percent, respectively) and local publications (39 percent compared to 52 percent, respectively). This furthers the notion that international journalists are more interested in covering news on the regional, national and international level, rather than on the local level, and may also be reflective of the relative unpopularity of cable news in other areas of the world.

International journalists are much more likely than North American media to view non-independent, corporate sources as "very credible" than they are independent sources. For example, international media are more likely to believe CEOs are credible (26 percent compared to 20 percent for the North American media) and are more likely to believe the credibility of corporate spokesperson (16 percent compared to 8 percent for the North American media). These findings suggest that international journalists have managed to maintain a higher level of trust in corporations and their communications practices, despite the corporate lapses in ethics that have occurred overseas and in the United States.

Journalists reporting in the United States and Canada are more likely to believe that readers are credible (19 percent compared to 13 percent for international media). Additionally, North American media are far more likely to believe that industry analysts are very credible, at 48 percent compared to 39 percent for international journalists, as well as industry experts (65 percent compared to 58 percent, respectively). It is interesting that, while international media are swayed by these

International publications rank very low among North American journalists as a news source for day-to-day reporting and editing, on these sources regularly.



International publications rank very low among North American journalists as a news source for day-to-day reporting and editing, on these sources regularly.

independent sources more than their North American counterparts, they trust these same sources less at the same time. This suggests that international journalists are more likely to believe that, when it comes to corporate information, only the corporations themselves have the whole story – and only they can be trusted to tell it correctly. At the same time, international sources seem to understand that when it comes to in-depth corporate and industry analysis and understanding, independent sources who spend their professional lives studying such subjects are the most suited to shape media perceptions.

Indeed, reporters overseas are more likely to have their perceptions informed by independent sources than their North American counterparts. Indeed, international journalists are much more likely to have their perceptions informed by academics than are North American reporters (45 percent compared to 30 percent, respectively), suggesting that international journalists have a deeper level of respect for the impartial knowledge that independent sources possess. These facts, all taken together, suggest that international journalists are more trusting of their sources in general and more open to allowing expert sources to influence their attitudes.

International journalists are not as impressed with non-expert sources, however. Indeed, North American media demonstrates a stronger trust in its readership and non corporate-affiliated consumers than do its international counterparts, suggesting that international journalists value an in-depth and expert understanding of an industry or subject more than they value the

“I don’t think it really should be a source for story ideas but a different way of engaging the reader.”

-Amey Stone
BusinessWeek Online



“human touch” of readers and consumers. Interestingly, both believe that anonymous sources are not very credible, with 4 percent for both groups – even though International journalists are more likely to use information from them in stories.

When it comes to reporting on corporations, International media is much more likely to note that financial performance affects overall company coverage (85 percent compared with 68 percent for North American media), and also more likely to rate the CEO’s performance as highly important for overall company coverage (75 percent compared with 65 percent for North American media). Interestingly, North American journalists are also less trusting of their colleagues than are international journalists (44 percent compared with 31 percent, respectively).

Technology: A Love-Hate Relationship with Blogs

As journalists continue to grapple with increasing public concern over longstanding reporting practices and growing skepticism about media credibility, as well as continuing corporate scandals and global crises, the rise of Weblogs is also forcing them to address a host of new questions and pressures resulting from the proliferation of this new media channel. The past year has been a momentous one for both journalists and bloggers alike, the latter because of their increasing influence and popularity, the former because of the rapidly changing media industry. The media is meeting the skyrocketing growth of blogs warily, and our study results show journalists’ conflicting attitudes towards the blogosphere. While journalists understand the value that blogs offer in terms of aiding in reporting practices and uncovering sources and scandals, they seem loath to admit that bloggers possess any credibility at all – perhaps due to their fear that traditional journalism will be usurped by the rise of the Weblog.

Despite their ambivalence, journalists are turning to blogs in record numbers, with more than half noting that they use Weblogs in

some way. This is markedly higher than the blog usage of the general public. Indeed, blogs have become a large – and arguably, increasingly integral – part of how journalists do their jobs, with 70 percent of those who use blogs doing so for work-related tasks. Most often, those work-related tasks involve finding story ideas, with 53 percent of journalists reporting using blogs for such purposes (Figure 27). But reporters also turn to blogs for other uses, with 43 percent using Weblogs to research stories and referencing facts, and 36 percent turning to the blogosphere to find sources. Most notable, fully 33 percent of journalists use blogs as a way of uncovering breaking news or scandals. Interestingly, 66 percent of journalists who use blogs do so for entertainment purposes, suggesting that the media has begun to integrate the blogosphere into other areas of their life aside from reporting.

At the same time, journalists are reluctant to admit that they trust blogs, with only 1 percent noting that they find Weblogs to be credible (Figure 12), and 3 percent admitting that blogs are very likely or likely to inform their views or perceptions (Figure 14). Indeed, only 9 percent of journalists who use blogs report that they use them for fact-checking purposes, further demonstrating a disconnect between reported usage of blogs and reported trust of blogs.

The disconnect is not only one-sided, however. Bloggers appear to have an ambivalent relationship with journalists as well. The growth of blogging is notable because the new medium is inherently different than other online interactive tools which have come before it. Though blogs follow much the same format as more traditional websites, where a site owner posts updated content on a fairly regular basis, they also possess much more dynamic features, including the ability for readers to comment, post their own responses, and even refute stories. For these reasons, many consumers view the blogosphere as self-regulating and democratic, allowing readers to have their say and point out factual errors. As blogging grows in popularity, an increasing number of bloggers are seen as “citizen journalists,” and the medium has played a dramatic role in uncovering the media’s lapses in credibility, from Rathergate to their calls for the resignation of CNN’s Eason Jordan. With these, and other, high-profile stories, bloggers increasingly find themselves struggling with the same challenge confronting traditional journalists: what the role of bloggers will be within the mainstream media. Many bloggers believe that they are, in fact, journalists, and consider themselves as such. Others pride themselves on their outsider status and eschew the “journalist” moniker.

With so many diverging viewpoints and such a diverse group, there does not yet exist a series of standards or rules of transparency for the blogosphere. A recent forum on blogging, journalism and credibility, held at Harvard University, attempted to address this issue, and further highlighted the broad spectrum of views bloggers hold on the topics of transparency, standards, and credibility. Some attendees felt that certain issues, such as disclosing affiliations, payments, or sponsorships in stories on relevant subjects were rules that applied to journalists, not to bloggers, while others felt that such guidelines would help to increase credibility. It appears as if bloggers are still struggling to define their role as it relates to the media. For the time being, however, journalists and bloggers seem to agree on one thing:

Figure 26 “Do you use Weblogs?” (n=595)

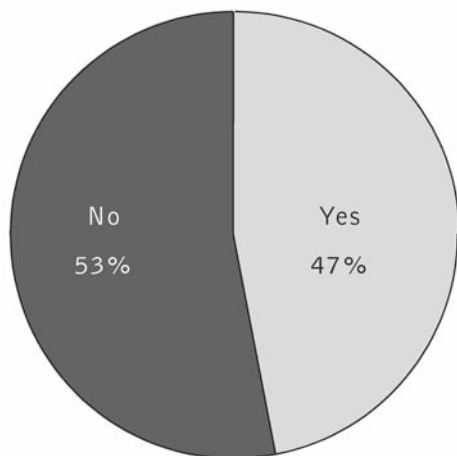
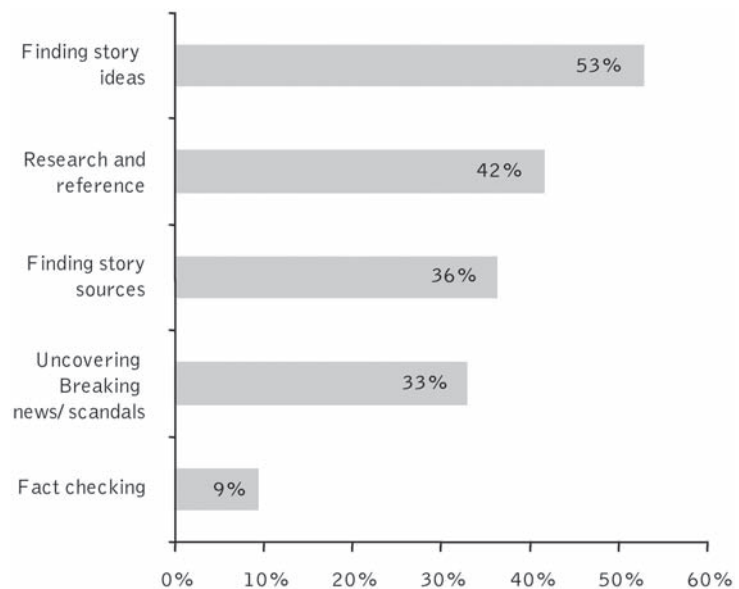


Figure 27 “How often do you use Weblogs?” Often or sometimes (n>303)



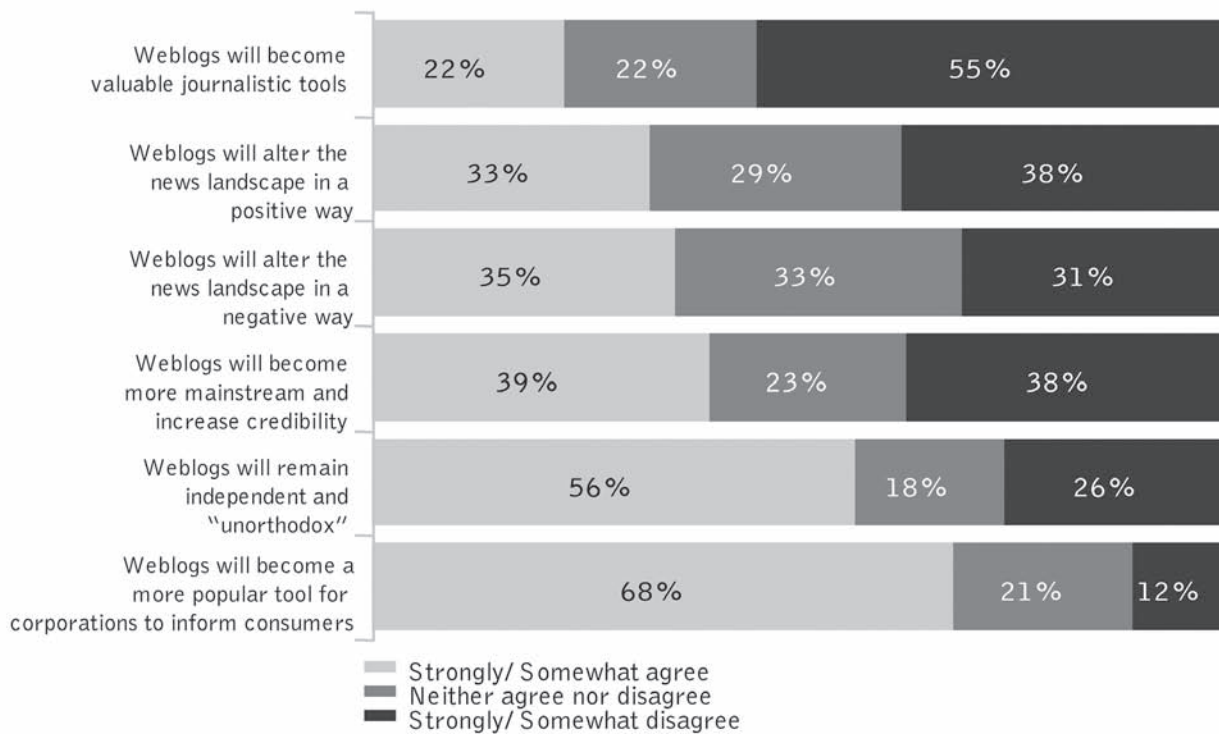
Journalists are also split as to the effects of blogging on journalism in general, with 35 percent asserting that blogs will alter the news landscape in a negative way, and 33 percent believing that their effects will be largely positive.

Journalists are also agreed that Weblogs have a healthy future in the coming year, but are split as to what kind of future that will be. Most believe that the blogosphere's journalistic future will be short-lived, with only 22 percent agreeing that blogs will become a valuable journalistic tool. Instead, journalists see blogs as a corporate instrument, with 68 percent agreeing that blogs will become more popular among companies seeking to inform consumers. This viewpoint may be reflective of journalists' general lack of ease with blogs' evolving role. Indeed, journalists may be eager to relegate blogs to a "corporate tool" rather than acknowledge the growing influence of the blogosphere on mainstream reporting. On the other hand, this finding may also indicate journalists have taken heed of the increasing trend toward corporations using viral marketing techniques and word of mouth to disseminate their message to consumers, and may foresee blogging to be a very suitable tool for that sort of corporate messaging.

At the same time, 56 percent agree that blogs will remain an independent and unorthodox means of disseminating information, suggesting that journalists simply do not want to see blogs as part of the mainstream media landscape.

Journalists are also split as to the effects of blogging on journalism in general, with 35 percent asserting that blogs will alter the news landscape in a negative way, and 33 percent believing that their effects will be largely positive. Due to the faster-than-the-speed-of-broadband nature of blogs and their rapid growth in popularity over the past 12 months, what the next year holds for the blogosphere is remarkably uncertain.

Figure 28 "How do you feel the role of Weblogs as media outlets will evolve in the coming year?" Strongly or somewhat agree (n>528)



IMPLICATIONS

Opening up the lines of communication and providing consistent, accurate and up-to-date information should extend all the way up the chain of command, and is necessary in order to help rebuild journalists' trust of corporations.

If corporations are to rebuild credibility with the media, it must happen at every level of the organization

From CEOs and corporate spokespeople to operations to marketing, all areas of the company must look to create a more open, honest dialogue with the media about not only their successes, but their problems as well. Opening up the lines of communication and providing consistent, accurate and up-to-date information should extend all the way up the chain of command, and is necessary in order to help rebuild journalists' trust of corporations. Indeed, those with the most open communication plans are the same ones that have built the most trust within the media. At the same time, corporate good deeds cannot be substituted for honest communication and business practices. In light of the attributes that journalists find more important to improving a company's media standing, such as innovation, consumer loyalty and product performance and quality, it is extremely important to communicate the latest information to the media as soon as possible – and be sure that it's not taken with a grain of salt.

Marketers must rethink who their most important stakeholders are in building corporate reputation

The media landscape is no longer defined by traditional outlets such as broadcast, print and online publications. The blogosphere is an increasingly important part of the machinery that consumers and the media use to inform themselves of the goings-on in the corporate world, and this emerging tool should not be ignored. Indeed, with more than half of media turning to blogs for information, research and story ideas, the influence of blogs on the larger media universe is impossible to overestimate. Due to the instantaneous nature of the blogosphere, stories can – and do – spread at the speed of light, reaching both journalists

and consumers who could both pass the information on to their own audiences. Marketers should thus turn their attention to blogs and other “nontraditional” outlets as viable options for building corporate reputation and disseminating information.

Blogs and blogging must become an essential part of the corporate communications landscape

As “citizen journalists,” bloggers are often seen as more trustworthy than corporate spokespeople and the traditional mainstream media. Recent revelations of scandal, broken and publicized by blogs, have led many consumers to believe that bloggers give them the straight story where other media outlets fail. In light of this, corporations should look to improve their perceived credibility by turning to the blogosphere both to connect to their customer base in a more personal and straightforward way, and reach out to journalists with company information. The ease and speed of blog publishing also make the medium perfectly suited for corporate communications in times of crisis. At the same time, the fast-paced nature of the newsroom is well-suited to the instantaneous spirit of blogging, and corporations may find that they can disseminate information to journalists more quickly – and more cheaply – than ever before.

Corporate-Consumer relations must shift to a new terrain if companies are to grow consumer trust

Blogs are useful to corporations for more than just crisis communications, however, and can be applied to companies' struggles to reach consumers in new and innovative ways. With blogs, word-of-mouth and viral marketing techniques more popular than ever before, traditional barriers between corporations and consumers are showing signs of breaking down, and the challenge of communicating with consumers is one that may be growing easier with each passing day. Indeed, companies no longer have to rely on the media or journalists to get their

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message out to the public; they can speak to them directly through employee, executive and official corporate Weblogs. The study's findings show that most journalists even agree that corporate blogging is the wave of the future. Blogs and other nontraditional sources have the added benefit of being less expensive and faster to disseminate, as well as being perceived as "unorthodox," and therefore further removed from the well-worn and mistrusted mainstream methods of communication. Additionally, the fact that so many consumers see blogs as a more credible, consumer-friendly source of information means that company Weblogs may also go a long way toward rebuilding corporate credibility among customers.

Newsrooms need to respond quickly and intensely when ethical policies and standards are broken – in the newsroom or the boardroom

Media have not demonstrated backbone in the face of recent ethical infractions nor corporate policies that could impact editorial freedom. This does not help the cause for improving media credibility. Indeed, revelations of paid journalists as spokespeople, forged documents, and even journalists folding in the face of threatened jail time to reveal their sworn anonymous sources have tarnished the industry. This damage does not have to be irreparable, however. Journalists can rebuild their credibility by moving quickly to stem the flood when a crisis of ethics occurs, both in the newsroom and in the boardroom.

Consumers are redefining the future of journalism

The media need to reconsider their relationship with blogs, which can provide a reliable pulse point for consumer sentiment and help journalists engage more with their readers. With more and more blogs starting up every day, journalists have a wealth of information at their fingertips – to engage with readers, to determine the public's opinions and attitudes about current events and news stories, and to track the spread of the news. This outlet also provides the opportunity for journalists to connect

directly with consumers themselves, allowing them to comment on already-published stories and find ideas for new leads. At the same time, some reporters have started blogs of their own, interacting with their readership in a way that helps consumers to feel more involved in the news and the world around them, and helping them to trust journalists on a more personal level. At the same time, consumers are changing the very content and format of the news they read and watch. Consumers who were born and raised in the age of the Internet are increasingly reliant on online sources for their news, and have grown accustomed to sharing their views in a dynamic, virtual format. They are not shy about dictating exactly how they'd like to view their news, and many media outlets are heeding readers' demands for shorter articles, mobile and easy-to-read formats such as podcasting, and free newspapers such as AM and Metro.

Known sources may get lost in the focus on unknown sources

Many column inches and broadcast minutes have been devoted over the last few months to the controversy surrounding anonymous sources, the accuracy of anonymously received information, and journalistic privilege to protect sources' identities. However, what has been lost in the recent spotlight on anonymous sources has been the need to examine all sources based on credibility, motivations and accuracy. In light of the study's findings that industry experts, analysts, academics and the government are some of the most frequent sources for information – as well as other news publications – it is in journalists' best interests to ensure that all sources are accurate. And not only in their own stories but in other reporters' stories as well – thereby ensuring that incorrect stories do not gain traction and spread throughout the media.



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