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# UNRAVELLING THE NET

## Aim

- ◆ To develop skills to analyse presentation and content of information available on the web.

## Outcome

- ◆ Participants will have a more critical attitude to material they access on the web.

## What you need

Internet access for participants (the online part of this activity could be completed in participants' own time, group discussion can follow); **Actionpage:** *Unravelling the net*

## What you do

- ▷ Explain that more and more organisations are using the world wide web (www) to sell products (marketing) and promote themselves. Individuals and organisations also use the www to publish information, just as they publish articles or reports on paper. Both NGOs and TNCs see it as another medium for public relations – a means to change public opinion and behaviour or gain support.
- ▷ Participants should choose two websites (one commercial, one NGO) from the list. Ensure that the whole range of sites is covered by the group.
- ▷ Using the Actionpage, they should analyse the content and presentation of the site. They can print pages (ideally in colour) to illustrate the main points of interest. These should be mounted on flip chart paper and marked to identify key design features, images and text.
- ▷ After individual analysis the flip charts should be displayed and time given for group to look at each others' work.

## Whole group discussion

- ▷ Invite one person to present their analysis of a TNC, highlighting the main design features and message from the text. Ask another to present their evaluation of an NGO.
- ◆ Which groups of people have access to information from the www?
- ◆ Which groups are excluded? Why?
- ◆ What are the biggest differences between the sites of businesses and pressure groups?
- ◆ Would more conventional media, eg paper-based, be more effective at creating a positive attitude towards these organisation and their work? Why?
- ◆ In what circumstances is the www an effective means of PR? Why?
- ◆ How can you find out if the information provided is accurate?
- ◆ Of all the sites surveyed which looked most attractive and interesting? Why?
- ◆ Which has the most interesting content? Why?
- ◆ How important are appearance, structure, navigation aids, content to users of the www?
- ◆ How might the www change PR in the future?
- ◆ Do you prefer to access information from screen or paper?
- ◆ What impact will this technology have on our life styles, eg armchair shopping, research?

### “**RULE SEVEN**

***Watch the Web as closely as the traditional media. 40 million people out there could be chatting away about your situation, spreading information or misinformation. So you must have an Internet monitoring service in place to make sure that you're seeing not only what the traditional media is saying, but also what's going on in chat rooms and on the Web.***”

Harlan Teller, Executive Managing Director, Hill & Knowlton in *Ten Crisis Rules of the Road*

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## Key ideas

- ◆ Recently, use of the internet for marketing, PR and publishing information has exploded.
- ◆ The advantage of the www is that you can access a vast amount of information if you know where to find it, and sort the gems from the rubbish – all from the comfort of your PC!
- ◆ Although the number of people using the www continues to grow exponentially, many people are excluded because they do not have access – the majority of people in the developing world, poor people in all countries, fewer women use it. With the growing importance of the www, these people will be even more disadvantaged.
- ◆ Information on the www reflects the beliefs and objectives of the organisations who publish the material. It is no more reliable than information presented in more conventional media.
- ◆ Pressure groups have been able to mount successful international campaigns because of the power of the www. Anti-globalisation demonstrations, eg Seattle, have been coordinated through the internet. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was defeated in large part because of the sharing of information via the www.
- ◆ Many TNCs have been under the spotlight because of their record on workers' rights and the environment. Most have responded with new mission statements which add social and environmental dimensions to their economic performance. Their slick websites are very effective at presenting an image of corporate responsibility. It is still difficult to know if this is mainly window dressing, and whether claims can be verified by independent sources.
- ◆ As technology has improved (faster modems, computers with larger memory and faster processing speeds), new on-screen graphic styles have emerged to facilitate movement around the site and create effects to interest the surfer, eg flashing logos, video clips. These styles have influenced conventional design, especially when designers want a more hi-tech look, eg flow chart symbols.
- ◆ Web pages can be printed out onto paper to make them more usable, eg for reference. Printouts do not have the same visual impact as conventional leaflets, newsletters etc.

## Follow-up

- ◆ Design a website to raise awareness of an issue agreed by the group. The site should be about six pages and use at least two images.

## Websites

### Commercial

[www.unilever.com/](http://www.unilever.com/)  
[www.bodyshop.com/](http://www.bodyshop.com/)  
[www.bnfl.com/](http://www.bnfl.com/)  
[www.monsanto.com/](http://www.monsanto.com/)  
[www.nestle.com/](http://www.nestle.com/)  
[www.riotinto.com/](http://www.riotinto.com/)  
[www.shell.com/](http://www.shell.com/)  
[www.starbucks.com/](http://www.starbucks.com/)

### NGOs

[www.babymilkaction.org/](http://www.babymilkaction.org/)  
[www.oneworld.net/](http://www.oneworld.net/)  
[www.christian-aid.org/](http://www.christian-aid.org/)  
[www.foe.org/](http://www.foe.org/)  
[www.greenpeace.org/](http://www.greenpeace.org/)  
[www.oxfam.org/](http://www.oxfam.org/)  
[www.mcspotlight.org/index.html](http://www.mcspotlight.org/index.html)  
[www.ran.org/](http://www.ran.org/)

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# Actionpage: Unravelling the net

More and more organisations are using the world wide web (www) to sell products and promote themselves. Corporations see it as another medium for public relations and a means to create a positive identity. Pressure groups also use it to affect public opinion and encourage action for change.

Use this questionnaire to analyse both the content and presentation of websites. Spend some time looking around the site, making note of pages which have attractive designs or interesting content. The home page of most corporate sites will have sections on economic performance (investor relations), values (including environment and workers' rights), FAQ (frequently asked questions) and community involvement. The site map will help navigation.

- ◆ Website address
- ◆ Organisation
- ◆ Main objectives of organisation (eg areas of business or charitable purposes)
  
- ▷ Print out home page for reference (in colour if possible)
  - what colours are used?
  
  - what images are used?
  
  - what graphics are used?
  
  - what is the immediate impression of this organisation given by the homepage?
  
- ◆ Are you encouraged to explore the site further? How?
  
- ◆ What helps or hinders you finding your way around the site?
  
- ▷ Choose a representative photo from the site (print out)
  - where is the photo taken?

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- who or what is portrayed?
  
  - what is happening?
  
  - how does the photo relate to the text?
  
  - how does the photo relate to the organisation?
  
  - how does the photo influence your attitude towards the organisation?
- ▷ Choose a section of the site which deals with values (corporate) or campaigns (pressure group), print out, in colour if possible.
- ◆ What are the differences/similarities between the design (ie colour, layout, type style, graphics, images) of these pages and rest of the site?
  
  - ◆ How does the design influence your perception of:
    - the overall values of the organisation?
  
    - how the organisation relates to people and their communities?
  
    - the attitudes of the organisation to the environment?
  
  - ◆ Analyse the text:
    - highlight key words in the text (eg community, environment)
    - highlight (in another colour) key facts or information in text
    - highlight (in another colour) opinions expressed in text.

▷ Mount the text on a sheet of flip chart paper. Write down points raised by the text and use an arrow to indicate for example:

    - relevant issues or facts that the material ignores
    - facts or information that you would question
    - opinions that you disagree with.