CATEGORY T: Outstanding Initiatives in New Media
116th Public Affairs Detachment

BACKGROUND

The 116th Public Affairs Detachment launched four new social media sites in September 2009. These sites developed during post-mobilization training (Sept. 2009-Oct. 2009) as we learned that Camp Bondsteel's Kosovo Forces (KFOR) web page was being canceled based on decisions made by our predecessors. The KFOR 12 new media sites' development and launch took place while the Public Affairs Soldiers were traversing through post-mobilization training and developed into a major aspect of the overall communication plan in a very short time.

These tools were chosen to disseminate public and strategic information involving the KFOR 12 deployment, in which the 116 PAD serves as brigade-level public affairs support for U.S. Soldiers as well as soldiers from Armenia, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. We recognized that in a deployed environment, social media sites could serve as additional venues to communicate with the critical audiences at home and the international audience interested in the KFOR NATO mission.

The four sites we initiated in September included a Facebook fan page, a microblog through Twitter, video sharing through YouTube and photo sharing through Flickr. As the deployment progressed, we also began relying on Skype, the online conferencing service, to conduct media engagements, lacking a DVIDS system to connect with media outlets and groups of supporters across the U.S. and Virgin Islands.

Our communication objectives and target audiences for these sites and tools are explained further below.

OBJECTIVES

We had a number of objectives in mind when we launched the KFOR/116th PAD social media sites in September 2009 but the one clear goal was enhancing global communications.

First, we wanted to ensure that communication about the deployment was comprehensive. Due to the sheer number of servicemembers deployed – approximately 1,400 U.S. Soldiers and close to 800 Armenia, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine Soldiers – we understood that having an easy-to-access online medium would aid in keeping our Soldiers, Families, employers, supporters and friends well informed of command information and the other unique aspects of a NATO mission.

Through communicating the key message of the KFOR mission to the internal audience and the world audience we enhanced confidence and faith in KFOR 12 and we had the opportunity to engage in dialogue through these sites to address issues, questions or capture ideas for further Public Affairs development.

Second, using social media as an instrument of personal, not just professional, communication greatly complimented the traditional media used. Our audience – largely made up of Family and friends of the deployed and employers and supporters from each respective state – were able to interact with their Soldiers through comments under stories about those very same Soldiers. This dialogue benefited not only the follower but the command as well, offering the opportunity to address any issues that surfaced through the Family Readiness Groups, Video Teleconferences or media strategies implemented by the KFOR Public Affairs Office/116th PAD.

Third, because there are a large number of Soldiers who use social media regularly, we were able to share public affairs information much more quickly than through traditional methods, allowing the message to spread virally though each effort.

In order to fulfill these objectives, our purpose was to keep our content engaging and encourage conversation on a variety of topics and issues. We solicited comments and implemented tools, such as Photo-of-the-Month contests, to make the experience even more interactive and beneficial to KFOR, the military and our audience.

TARGET AUDIENCES

On **Facebook**, our target audience is the National Guard Family, friends and followers of the states represented in our ranks. A quick analysis of the more than 500 fans we had as of Dec. 31, 2009, shows that many are National Guard Soldiers and their Family members. The opportunity to share information and see it grow virally created a positive outlet for the audience.

On **Twitter**, our audience is primarily external. The majority of followers are military-related organizations and the general public. As of Dec. 31, 2009, we had 77 followers at http://twitter.com/KFOR_PAO.

On **Flickr** and **YouTube**, our audience encompassed those internal and external sources, as well as viewers who found their way to these accounts by way of external references. Having accounts on both these sites enabled us to show, not just tell, the stories of our deployed Soldiers.

The value of these sites was quickly realized as media outlets were directed to Flickr and YouTube for additional products to support their packages. Each media release directed them to our social sites. We also used DVIDS and the North Dakota National Guard FTP site as mechanisms to get supporting content out. With the overall effort, we have seen extremely positive feedback from global media, thanking KFOR Public Affairs for its efforts. The end result has been a unified effort that expanded on our goal to communicate the KFOR mission to key audiences.

The response has been overwhelming. In the first three months of our account's existence, our

Flickr photos were viewed almost 13,000 times. Our YouTube videos were viewed almost 1,900 times. We believe these services enhance our traditional methods of visual product distribution, such as DVIDS, and help us reach a larger audience.

Our practice has been to channel all information released to our social sites. For example, once a news release was sent out by traditional methods, key quotes and links for the release were sent via Twitter and posted to Facebook, with video supporting the release posted to YouTube and high resolution photos posted to Flickr. All this supported our media customers with products they could use to develop their packages, adding to the impact each release had and the audience reached.

On **Skype**, our audience is both internal and external. For example, we have had an ongoing relationship with a television station in Bismarck, N.D. The station interviews a Soldier every week via Skype. They broadcast the interview to the home audience, but they also post the video to their Web Site, as well as transcribing it, so it is available to people around the world, including the deployed audience in Kosovo.

Lacking a DVIDS dish, we quickly identified Skype as a way to communicate our stories. We supported the Skype interviews with b-roll video, posted to DVIDS and the N.D. National Guard FTP site. Multiple TV stations from across the U.S. have used the b-roll and Skype to engage their audience and show how Soldiers are using new ways to communicate with home.

Moreover, not only have we used Skype as a tool to facilitate video interviews with media outlets, we have used it to communicate with hometown groups, such as military family members and elementary school students, who in a previous era might only have been able to communicate with Soldiers as pen pals.

NEW/TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTREACH

We used social media tools to expand our reach, audience and our ability to tell the story of the KFOR 12 deployment.

We continued to send media advisories and news releases via e-mail through our media distribution list, the traditional way of doing business. This ensures wide distribution of our material. When photos accompany those releases, media are directed to our Flickr site to download high-resolution versions. Also, video posted to You Tube supports visual media and enhances our coverage opportunities. The advisories and releases are then posted to Facebook, with a link sent out via Twitter to alert our wider audience to the released information.

The new media outlets we rely on have become more valuable as we have moved forward in our deployment. Camp Bondsteel had a Web Site for many years, but in October 2009, prior to our arrival in Kosovo, KFOR headquarters decided to discontinue it. Consequently, we have relied heavily on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Skype to provide online content to the world that we cannot provide via our own Web Site.

NEW MEDIA CONTENT

The KFOR 12/116th PAD Public Affairs effort in social media falls under these categories: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

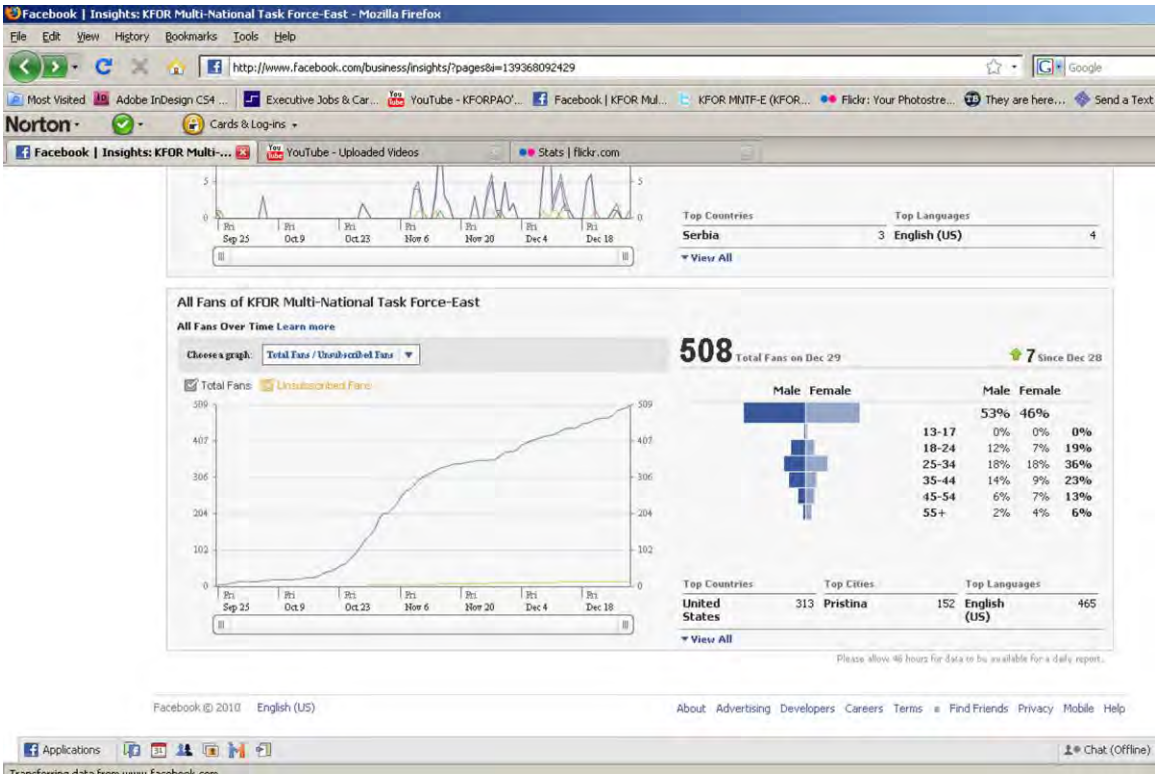
Our efforts within each area are highlighted below:

Facebook: KFOR Multi-National Task Force-East
http://www.facebook.com/pages/KFOR-Multi-National-Task-Force-East/139368092429?ref=mf

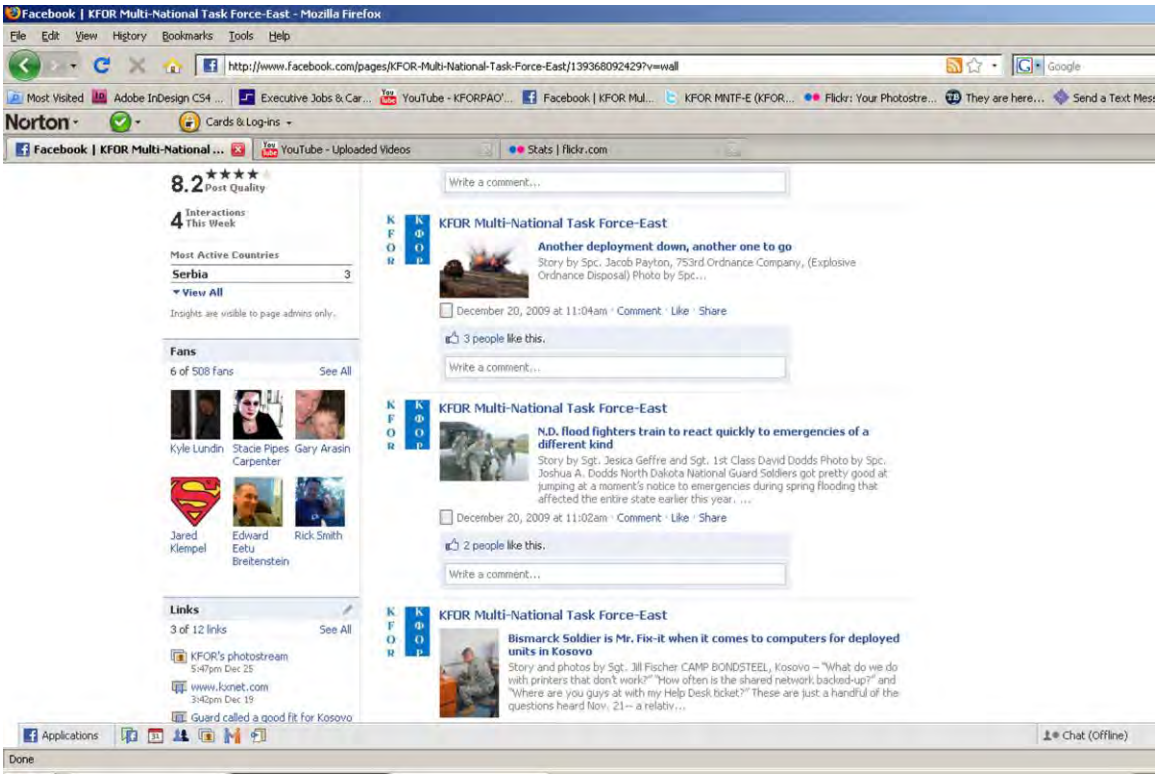
Multi-National Task Force-East implemented a Facebook fan page in September 2009. To start, the content of the site was focused on our military training at Camp Atterbury, Ind., and at Hohenfels, Germany. When we arrived in Kosovo in late October, the site became a place where we could tell the day-to-day story of our mission.

Facebook Impact/Statistics

From September through the end of 2009, we gained 508 fans at
http://www.facebook.com/pages/KFOR-Multi-National-Task-Force-East/139368092429?ref=mf
As the graphic below shows, our number of fans climbed sharply after we finished training in Germany and began to perform our mission in Kosovo.



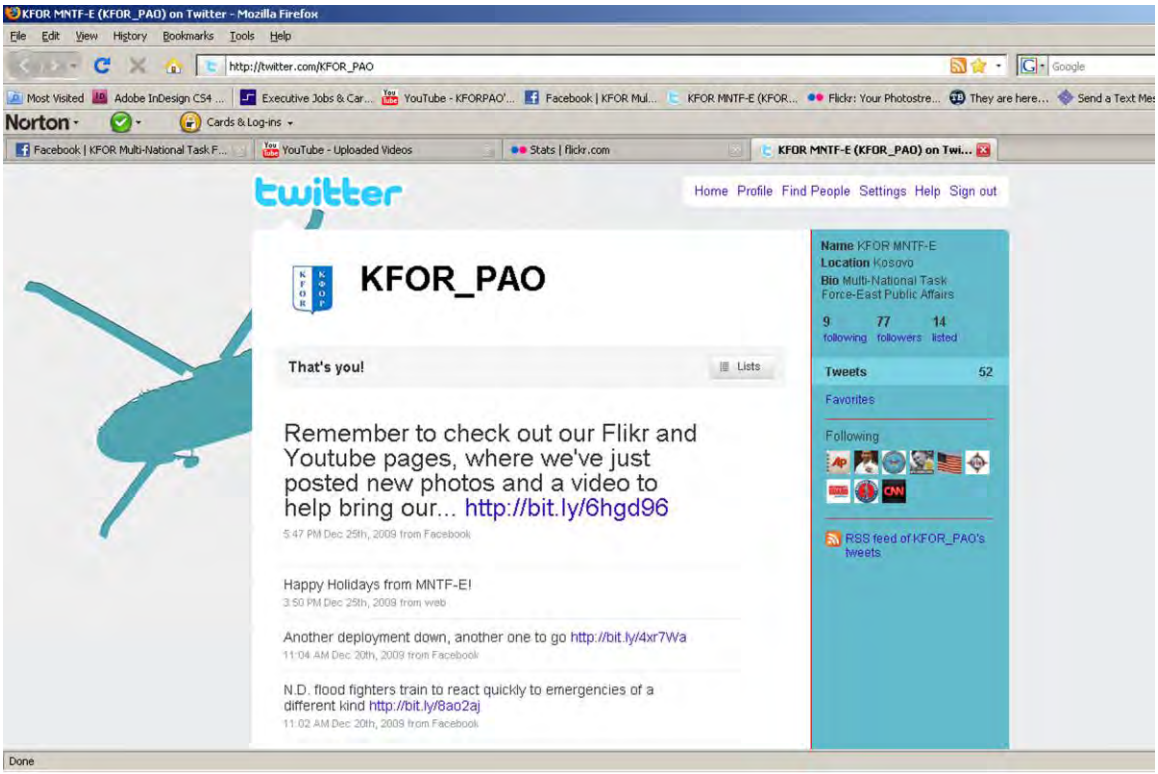
The graphic below shows that as of late December 2009, our fans believed that the quality of our posts to Facebook was high.



Twitter: KFOR_PAO
http://twitter.com/KFOR_PAO

Our first tweet was sent Sept. 13, 2009, about one month after we began our mobilization training at Camp Atterbury, Ind. Our tweets outline the story of our training and the KFOR-12 mission to date.

Twitter Impact/Statistics
As of late December 2009, we had 77 followers at http://twitter.com/KFOR_PAO and we had sent out 52 tweets. Our mission began on Nov. 14 in Kosovo, to give a reference mark of growth.

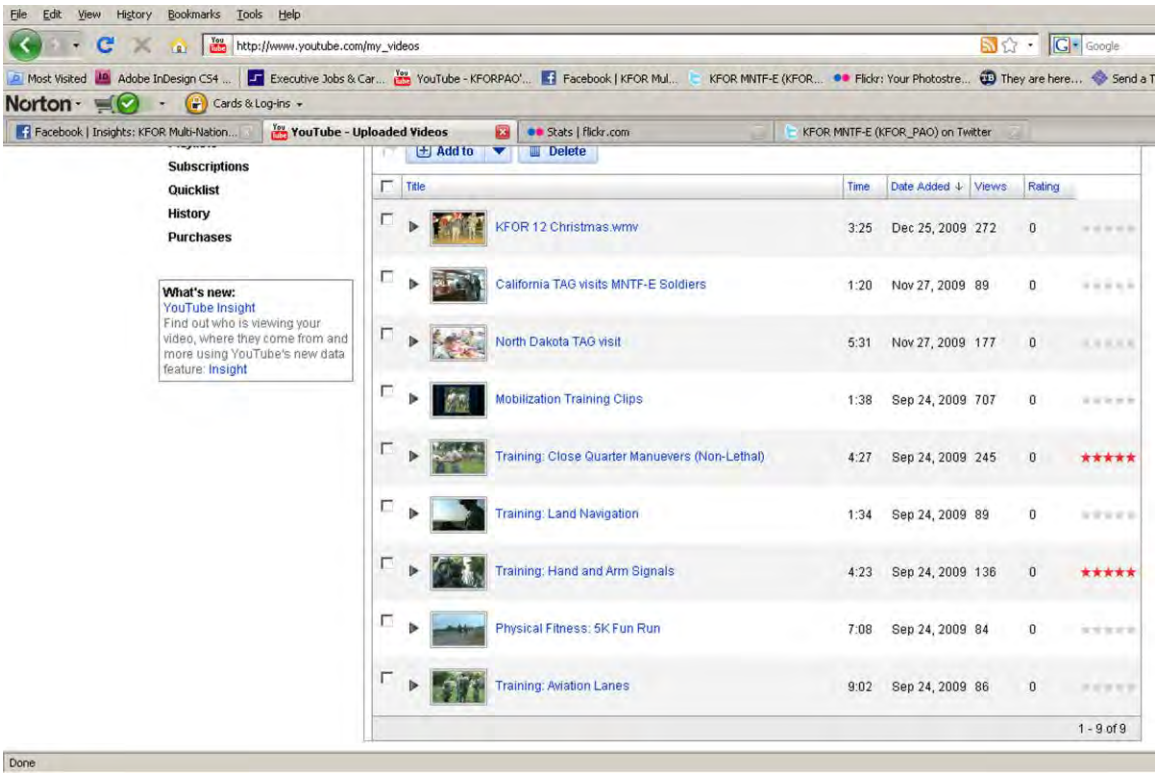


YouTube: KFOR PAOs Channel
http://www.youtube.com/user/KFORPAO

KFOR 12 Public Affairs launched a YouTube presence in late September 2009. Early on, it became a place to showcase our training.

YouTube Impact/Statistics

As of Dec. 31, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/user/KFORPAO had nine videos showcased, which had received 1,885 views. Nine people had subscribed to receive KFOR 12's YouTube updates. The most-played video on the KFOR 12 YouTube channel received 707 views in a little more than three months.



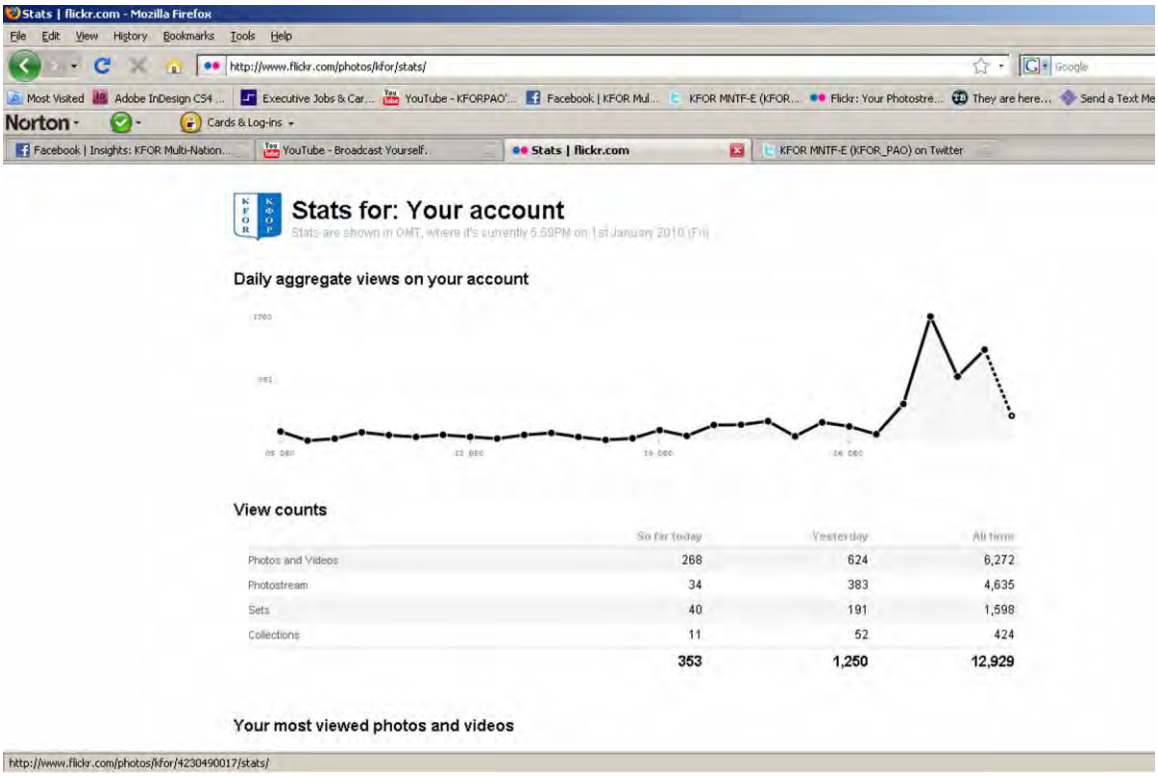
Flickr: KFOR's Photostream
http://www.flickr.com/photos/kfor/

We launched our Flickr site in late September.

In late 2009, we began directing media to Flickr, rather than an FTP site, to download high-resolution photographs to accompany media advisories and news releases. This was an improvement over the FTP site because media could see what there is to choose from more easily, and they also can see other KFOR-related photo sets that may spark their interest. This has been well received based on direct feedback from media outlets.

Flickr Impact/Statistics

- As of Dec. 31, 2009, we had uploaded 794 photos to Flickr.
- From September 2009 through Dec. 31, 2009, those photos received 12,929 views on Flickr.



Skype

Soldiers throughout KFOR 12 have used Skype to communicate with their families since the beginning of the deployment. Through this, we gained a general familiarity with Skype and its capabilities. By the time we arrived in Kosovo, the 116 PAD realized that we could put Skype to use for video communications with the media, including broadcast interviews.

During Thanksgiving 2009, we began working with stateside media to make KFOR 12 Soldiers available for holiday interviews on Skype. By the end of 2009, we had facilitated 19 total Skype interviews with the following television stations: KXMB and KFYR in Bismarck, N.D., WVTM in Columbus, Ga., and 11-Alive in Atlanta, Ga.

Skype is an ephemeral medium and we have no Skype Web Site. The stations listed above, however, did present their Skype interviews both as a broadcast product and a Web-accessible video. In this way, the interviews were available not only to the broadcast audience, but to our own internal audience and the worldwide public as well.

We have established a regular relationship with KXMB, which advertises and features a Skype interview with one KFOR 12 Soldier every week. The interviews air on the 6 p.m. News Sunday night, so people in North Dakota know that they can tune in at a specific time to see a KFOR 12 Soldier. KXMB also posts video of the interview video plus a transcription on their Web Site.

CONCLUSION

Our social media presence has grown from no presence at the beginning of our mobilization (due to the fact that we used the North Dakota National Guard social sites up to the time we departed for our mobilization station) to a point, in the past three months, where it has become a primary aspect of our overall global strategic communications plan. We fully anticipate each will continue to grow throughout our deployment in 2010. This assessment is based on the simple fact that each event, release and opportunity in Kosovo is tied together in all social and traditional aspects. Each release goes out under the same procedure, with social media used to engage our audience, thus allowing immediate feedback and creating new public affairs opportunities.

The statistics and feedback we have received demonstrate that our new media communications have been well received, well utilized and viewed as a credible, accurate and instantaneous form of communication. They have also been a primary source for media to gather products for their stories, enhancing the overall communication objective.

Additionally, our use of new media, particularly Skype, has opened up numerous opportunities to further interact with traditional media and nontraditional organizations. This will continue to be a critical component of our overall strategic communications plan.