

The Explain Yourself Index 2019: Which companies are best at using online channels to explain themselves?

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EXPLAINING “EXPLAIN YOURSELF”: WHAT THE INDEX MEASURES

The title of the Index, “Explain Yourself”, is a phrase with two meanings. First, it is what a parent asks of a misbehaving child – “Can you explain why you have been bad and what you are going to do about it?” It’s a question that any number of high-profile companies will have to answer at some stage. When will it be yours?

Second, “Explain yourself” is what people ask if they want to know who you are and what you do. You may be very good at explaining and promoting your products or services. But can you explain yourself, as a corporation?

The 20 companies in the Explain Yourself Index are the best in the U.S. at communicating about themselves on websites and social media.

The companies in the Index were drawn from the largest 200 companies in the world by market capitalization. Bowen Craggs and OCR identified 95 U.S. companies and five global companies with high recognition in the U.S. (according to The Harris Poll). Phase one screened companies based on company information and reputation metrics. Phase two evaluated this short list of 32 companies with more granular metrics to create the top 20 ranking.

Disclosure: Seven of the 20 companies in the ranking are, or have been, clients of Bowen Craggs. Scores are based on independent evaluations and are available for review. For more information, contact Dan Drury – ddrury@bowencraggs.com • +44 7786 707434

For a more in-depth discussion of the Explain Yourself methodology, see page 13.

Foreword

By Craig E. Carroll Ph.D, Founder and Executive Director, The OCR

As corporate affairs executives know, disclosure serves critical roles. For corporate governance, it is an antidote to mitigate misconduct and corruption; for stakeholder engagement, it increases stakeholders' confidence and belief in companies' transparency.

Both companies and their stakeholders have their issues with corporate disclosure. For stakeholders, excess disclosure leads to confusion and noise pollution, and the lack of agreed-upon criteria leads to a lack of comparability across companies. In turn, companies must find the optimal level of disclosure that meets stakeholders' decision-making needs without disrupting organizational operations or compromising competitive advantage. Both too little and too much disclosure creates a belief that companies are hiding something. And, companies can't claim transparency outright without breeding further skepticism and cynicism.

These issues create the need to have agreed-upon systems or guidelines that companies can follow and that meet the decision-making needs of their stakeholders.

The OCR has been involved in these challenges in material disclosure tied to ESG, corporate political activity, and stakeholder engagement through the development of measures, scorecards, and benchmarking. But one

“Collaborating between The OCR and Bowen Craggs to produce one measure of corporate disclosure made sense.”

challenge remains: more companies need to be scored and graded for the measures and feedback to matter.

I first discovered Bowen Craggs through our website research funded by the IABC Research Foundation. And, companies participating in The OCR Network (European firms operating in the U.S., and a U.S. firm operating in Europe) were included in their previous analyses. Bowen Craggs already produced the *Index of Online Excellence*, a ranking and grading of companies based on their online communications that included 200 companies. Bowen Craggs introduced the *Explain Yourself Index* (examining how companies explained themselves in terms of their purpose, their history, and their CSR) in Europe in 2017, with 15 firms.

To me, it became clear that the real value of the *Explain Yourself Index* was in growing the

number of companies that were included in the analysis, most notably by including U.S. companies. Having a plethora of measures and scorecards only creates confusion. And, given the unique issues in the U.S. business and political environment, it was clear those issues tied to corporate political disclosures needed to be included as well.

So, collaborating between The OCR and Bowen Craggs to produce one measure made sense. The more we can expand the Index to include more companies, the more value corporate affairs executives can bring to their companies by knowing where they stand among their peers.

I hope you enjoy our inaugural report in the U.S. I further hope that you will work with us in future years to expand the list of companies included.

Thank you!



Overview

By David Bowen, Founding Partner, Bowen Craggs & Co

Companies are increasingly realizing that however brilliant their products and services, they need to be able to explain themselves as organizations. If they are under attack, they must get their views across, but even if they are not, they need to promote themselves as socially responsible, caring about the environment and the community – or they will miss out on sales, on the best employees, and ultimately on their stock price.

The obvious channel to get these messages across is the internet, which is why corporate websites and social media pages now buzz with feel-good stories, rigorous environmental reporting, and high-quality information on “who we are and what we do.”

The *Explain Yourself Index* answers the question: Which companies are best at using online channels to explain who they are, what they do, and why they are a force for good in the world?

A new view of capitalism?

In September 1970, the economist Milton Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* that business executives who pursued a goal other than making money were “unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades.” They suffered from “analytical looseness and lack of rigor.” He set the tone for the next few decades: make as much money as you can, businesses were told, and don’t be distracted by any vague notion of “doing good.”

Fifty years later, Milton Friedman’s core philosophy of shareholder value as the primary purpose for business is being challenged on many fronts. The Accountable Capitalism Act, which Senator Elizabeth Warren introduced last August, is one example. Directors of U.S.

companies with more than \$1bn in revenue will be obliged “to consider the interests of all corporate stakeholders – including employees, customers, shareholders and the community in which the company operates.”

Prof. Friedman would turn in his grave, but The Accountable Capitalism Act is plowing a furrow that is already being marked out by business. “Non-financial reporting” is spreading fast in the U.S. – and like most new concepts it risks being drowned in alphabet soup, but ESG, CSR and SRI are all tugging away at the primacy of shareholder value. “Ethical investing” is huge, and corporations work ever more to keep the ESG/CSR/SRI expert communities happy.

Crisis management and promoting contributions to society

The impact of a crisis on the public perception of business is clear enough – ask BP after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, Volkswagen with its diesel emission scandal, Wells Fargo after its account frauds, or Uber (pick from any number of crises). But the positive commercial benefits of promoting social responsibility have also been establishing themselves.

We have become used to CEOs such as Unilever’s recently retired Paul Polman preaching “business must be good” and “profit with purpose” messages. It is more startling when the

Overview *continued*

boss of one of the world’s most hard-nosed corporations, ExxonMobil, starts singing the same tune. But when Darren Woods became chief executive of the oil and gas giant, at the start of last year, the *Financial Times* said, “he took charge of a company in reduced circumstances. Exxon has more need to explain itself now, and Mr. Woods says he is committed to doing that.”

After Dara Khosrowshahi took over as CEO of a much-criticized Uber, he wrote to staff: “The truth is that there is a high cost to a bad reputation... we will show that Uber is not just a really great product, but a really great company that is meaningfully contributing to society, beyond its business and its bottom line.”

The internet is your principal window, and your voice

So, we now have corporations that want to promote their positive impacts. That leads to a question: how? Where do you display this lovely clean face, and where do you explain your misdemeanors? Well, marketing, advertising, and public relations can help, but there is one really obvious place: the internet.

By far the most cost-effective and powerful way to get your voice heard is through your websites and social media channels. They are not only the

“By far the most cost-effective and powerful way to get your voice heard is through websites and social media channels.”

principal windows through which the world will see you; they are also your voice.

Amazon, which missed out on our ranking despite a slick new “about” site and blog called “Day One”, is famous for doing one thing well: serving customers. But in 2017 it hired Ashley Brown (who set up Coca-Cola’s well-regarded “Journey” site, which places sixth in the *Explain Yourself Index*) to establish a corporate digital communications operation.

The reasoning, Mr. Brown says, is that Amazon decided it needed a “social license to operate.” “And that’s where we come in,” he said. “We build the platform, the means, and the voice that translates corporate action into social license.”

Amazon’s corporate digital presence is missing some elements, such as comprehensive ESG and political communication, and good

INDEX LEADERS – THE TOP FIVE

1 Johnson & Johnson 92/120*

The whole corporate website is designed to build the company’s standing – with strong stories, a nice look, and more coordination than most

2 BP 91/120

Effective in all areas except “about” and political disclosure. Specific strengths include a particularly good magazine, history, and ESG data presentation

= 3 Texas Instruments 89/120

The old-fashioned look of the corporate website is unpromising, but it has very strong messages. Much information on community and very clear on political activity

= 3 Nestlé 89/120

Exceptional crisis management material, good stories, unusually wide range of social channels, but no political spending reports

5 Shell 88/120

The corporate website has excellent magazine material and comprehensive ESG reporting. Controversies are tackled, but in a very low profile way

*Total points available

For the full ranking of 20 companies, with scoring in 14 metrics, see pages 8 - 9.

Overview *continued*

usability, that would pull it into our top 20 table. But it could be on the way.

High-level findings

Leading U.S. corporations are aiming to make corporate websites “destinations”

The most obvious clue is the explosion of stories and magazine-style material. In the past corporate websites were a bit like filing cabinets – full of useful stuff, but not designed to give people a good time. Now the aim is to make sites – supported by social media – “destinations” in their own right.

Look at Johnson & Johnson, Coca-Cola, BP or Shell, and you will find words and pictures that

“In the past corporate websites were full of useful stuff, but not designed to give people a good time. Now the aim is to make sites ‘destinations’ in their own right.”

rival the best independent publishing. Can they ever really have the same credibility, given that they are by definition not independent? We think they can where the subject is something the company has unique knowledge of – whether it is the creatures Shell filmed while planting its deepest platforms, patient stories from J&J, quirky product stories from Coca-Cola (“Frozen Coke in a squeezable pouch? Only in Japan.”), or BP describing its latest technology.

Corporate “content” should not be dull

Linked to this is a growing understanding that the depressing word “content” is shorthand for much that can be exciting: great words, pictures, and videos.

We can spot where professional writers are at work – they understand how to craft headlines that will pull people in, start them reading and keep them reading. Like this from AbbVie: “A scientist’s retirement plan: Sterilize worms, eliminate neglected diseases.” Or this from BP’s history section: “The smell was unmistakable. It was a smell you could see. The vapors rose clearly in the sunlight and stank of rotten eggs. But to explorer George Reynolds it was the best thing he had smelled in seven years. He instructed the men to keep drilling.” Hard not to keep reading.

A company’s struggle to be believed is toughest when managing crises

Look at the opposing approaches of two often-criticized enterprises. Nestlé, the Swiss food giant, is a magnet for attack on any number of fronts. It used to ignore them, but now its “Ask Nestlé” section presents the criticisms and answers them. Walmart, by contrast, is mute on its many tricky issues. Which comes across as more credible? See top scorers for “Defending and Promoting Reputation”, page 10, for more.

Beauty helps a site engage

Look at Walt Disney or Amazon for overall visual brilliance – stunning images, carefully produced. Sometimes the brilliance is in the detail: Verizon’s subtle use of “looping video” to make a scientist blink brings life to an otherwise unremarkable image. But there is too often a dark side to glamor: usability can be sacrificed for visual impact, and that – on a complex site – does neither the company nor its visitors any favors. That is partly why neither Disney nor Amazon features in our top 20.

American and European companies can learn from each other’s strengths

In our experience, European companies have more coordinated online communications; this is because there is often one central person or

Overview *continued*

“Social channels are particularly good for amplifying the company’s voice and also, occasionally, getting involved in conversations.”

team responsible for corporate communications across the website, social media and other digital channels. American companies, however, are better at online political disclosure communications (see Political Disclosure and Engagement, page 12).

There is great variation in how well companies explain who they are and what they do

Some hardly bother. General Motors, for example, just misses out on the top 20 mainly because its company information is so weak – and it does not have a history section at all. This seems strange, because its history is so rich: why risk people going to other (possibly unfriendly) sources for the GM story?

Our favorite for history is Union Pacific; the whole site is a nostalgia-fest, which may well

be suitable for such a community-focused enterprise. Relatively few corporations are good at simply explaining what they do, and even fewer manage to transmit their “philosophy” without resorting to well-worn clichés.

One striking exception is Johnson & Johnson, whose celebrated “Credo” is close to poetry and is even called upon to guide its policy decisions (see Political Disclosure and Engagement, page 12).

Most companies could do more to “explain themselves” on social media channels

Social media can and should complement messages on websites, but social channels are particularly good for amplifying the company’s voice and also, occasionally, getting involved in conversations.

Most big companies have corporate Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, with Instagram the popular new kid on the block. The leaders in social media stand out mainly for the skill and frequency of their posts, and also in their ability and willingness to respond to critics.

Nestlé is slick at providing personalized answers to hostile comments – see the “Defending and Promoting Reputation” piece on page 10 for more. Amazon has a constellation of channels around the world to answer customers, but also

uses its blog to be forceful about issues when it wants to be (see Political Disclosure and Engagement, page 12).

Fewer companies exploit “web innovation” than did 15 years ago

Video is widely used, but the unique ability of the web for interactivity is much less evident than it was. This may be due to a belief that gimmicks have had their day, but the fashion for “gamifying” seems to be pretty much ignored. There are exceptions. Union Pacific’s “Great Race to the Promontory” is not a game but a piece of interactive historical fun. BP’s HSE charting tool is a seriously useful interactive feature – but can also be fun. If you want to engage people, why not let them enjoy themselves?

The Explain Yourself Index was created to highlight best practice in this fast-growing area of corporate communications – all of the companies in the Index are high-performers at some aspect of “explaining themselves.” And if your company did not make the ranking, there are lessons to be learned for your own corporate digital presence.

Read on to discover the full ranking with metric-by-metric scores, as well as more in-depth looks at defending and promoting reputation, ESG reporting, and political disclosure.

Top 20

Rank	Company	Magazine approach [5]	Usability and coherence [5]	Visual design [5]	Interaction with public and social channels [15]	Web innovation [5]	Who we are and organization [5]	Explaining approach, philosophy [5]	Leadership information [5]	History [5]	Defending and promoting reputation [25]	ESG data quality [10]	ESG data presentation [10]	Reporting political expenditure and activity [10]	Engagement in political issues [10]	Total score [120]
1	Johnson & Johnson	4	3	4	10	3	2	4	4	4	20	9	8	9	8*	92
	<i>www.jnj.com • The whole corporate website is designed to build the company's standing – with strong stories, a nice look, and more coordination than most</i>															
2	BP	5	4	4	12	4	3	3	3	5	19	9	9	3	8*	91
	<i>www.bp.com • Effective in all areas except “about” and political disclosure. Specific strengths include a particularly good magazine, history, and ESG data presentation</i>															
= 3	Texas Instruments	4	3	2	11	3	4	4	3	4	20	9	6	9	7	89
	<i>www.ti.com • The old-fashioned look of the corporate website is unpromising, but it has very strong messages. Much information on community and very clear on political activity</i>															
= 3	Nestlé	4	4	3	13	3	4	4	4	4	23	8	8	0	7*	89
	<i>www.nestle.com • Exceptional crisis management material, good stories, unusually wide range of social channels, but no political spending reports</i>															
5	Shell	5	2	5	12	4	3	4	4	4	19	9	6	4	7	88
	<i>www.shell.com • The corporate website has excellent magazine material and comprehensive ESG reporting. Controversies are tackled, but in a very low-profile way</i>															
= 6	Coca-Cola	5	3	4	12	3	3	3	3	4	20	6	6	8	7	87
	<i>www.coca-colacompany.com • The magazine element of the corporate website is strong but overall navigation is tricky. Responsibility messages are clear</i>															
= 6	Verizon Communications	4	3	4	9	4	3	4	4	4	18	8	6	8	8	87
	<i>www.verizon.com/about • The website looks good, with a strong performance in ESG and political disclosure metrics. The main weakness is a lack of interactivity, except for customer service areas</i>															
= 8	Volkswagen	4	2	4	7	4	4	4	3	4	20	9	8	5	7*	85
	<i>www.volkswagenag.com • Very open about the emissions scandal, much on history, with good ESG data. Navigation is the main weakness, and social media interactivity is minimal</i>															
= 8	FedEx Corporation	4	3	3	12	2	3	3	3	4	20	8	7	5	8	85
	<i>about.van.fedex.com • The web presence is strong in most areas, with the blog providing an open and friendly feel. ESG data is comprehensive, but there is a lack of data on political contributions</i>															
= 8	Union Pacific	4	3	3	12	4	4	3	3	5	20	5	5	7	7*	85
	<i>www.up.com • The site exudes a strong community and employee ethos, with exceptional history material. Weaknesses are an old-fashioned look and vague ESG data</i>															

Figures in brackets = maximum scores • Figures with asterisk = proportional scores (see page 13 for details)

Top 20 continued

Rank	Company	Magazine approach [5]	Usability and coherence [5]	Visual design [5]	Interaction with public and social channels [15]	Web innovation [5]	Who we are and organization [5]	Explaining approach, philosophy [5]	Leadership information [5]	History [5]	Defending and promoting reputation [25]	ESG data quality [10]	ESG data presentation [10]	Reporting political expenditure and activity [10]	Engagement in political issues [10]	Total score [120]
= 11	Estée Lauder Companies	3	3	5	9	4	4	4	4	4	21	5	5	6	7*	84
	<i>www.elcompanies.com • A web presence that looks great and has strong “who we are” material. The overall performance is let down by patchy ESG reporting</i>															
= 11	AbbVie	4	2	4	12	3	3	4	2	3	19	8	5	8	7	84
	<i>www.abbvie.com • Excellent stories are not promoted as well as they used to be. Other content is adequate but not exciting, and usability is a problem</i>															
= 13	Unilever	4	4	4	7	4	4	3	3	4	19	8	6	6	7	83
	<i>www.unilever.com • Strong sustainability messaging throughout. The recently retired CEO tweeted politically. The U.S. Facebook page is kept up to date, others are not</i>															
= 13	JPMorgan Chase	4	3	4	9	3	3	4	3	5	19	6	6	7	7*	83
	<i>www.jpmorganchase.com • Good stories and “responsibility” material, though little ESG data. The “How we do business” document is interesting for promoting social responsibility</i>															
= 13	Pfizer	4	2	4	10	3	2	4	4	4	18	6	6	9	7	83
	<i>www.pfizer.com • Poor usability on the corporate website causes problems. There is excellent magazine and political contribution information, but no interaction with the public</i>															
= 13	Merck	4	2	3	8	2	3	4	2	4	19	9	8	8	7	83
	<i>www.merck.com • ESG material on the corporate website is excellent and the history is good, but usability and coherence are weaknesses</i>															
17	Duke Energy	4	3	3	11	3	4	3	4	3	18	8	6	6	6	82
	<i>www.duke-energy.com • The web presence gives the impression of being busy and open, but doesn’t actually give all that much away. The company does try to interact with the public through its channels</i>															
18	PepsiCo	3	3	3	11	3	4	3	3	3	18	7	6	7	7	81
	<i>www.pepsico.com • The corporate website stands out for having a somewhat brash look. Otherwise, there is an average performance across most metrics, but it does provide good information on controversial subjects</i>															
= 19	Ford Motor Company	4	3	4	10	3	3	2	4	4	18	9	8	1	7*	80
	<i>www.corporate.ford.com • The corporate web presences has superb ESG reporting. There is good magazine material but basics “about” the company are poor</i>															
= 19	Walmart	4	3	3	12	2	4	3	4	4	17	5	7	5	7	80
	<i>www.corporate.walmart.com • There is strong magazine material and a sense that the company is trying to do good. But controversies are avoided, ESG data is weak, and political contributions are hard to find</i>															

Figures in brackets = maximum scores • Figures with asterisk = proportional scores (see page 13 for details)

Best Practice: Defending and Promoting Reputation Top Scorers

We call this metric “defending and promoting reputation.” For companies under attack, the defensive side is important, and we look at how well do they do this, on web and social media. But we look too at how they present their positive contributions to society. And for companies that have managed to avoid controversy, our scoring is entirely based on the positive side. These are the top performers and why they are better than the others.

1st (23/25): Nestlé

The Swiss company is in a class of its own when it comes to online crisis management. It has long been a magnet for attack – from a long running boycott around baby milk to specific local issues. For several years it has used the internet as its first line of defense. “Ask Nestlé”, on Nestle.com and country sites, presents questions and answers them clearly, often using Q&A format, and sometimes videos. Look too at Nestlé on Facebook. The company has honed the technique of merging personal answers with prepared answers, and links back to “Ask Nestlé.”

2nd (21/25): Estée Lauder Companies

Estée Lauder is a luxury company that uses the internet to underline its contributions to society with style. Evelyn Lauder launched the pink ribbon cancer awareness campaign in 1992, and it is widely promoted online. However,

this has generated criticism, for example of over-commercialization or “pink washing”, so the corporate site (elcompanies.com) has a “Values” section that tackles these and other issues seriously and clearly. Women’s and LGBT issues get strong coverage, while there is a good deal of detail on the environment and support in the community.

Joint 3rd (20/25): Shared by six companies

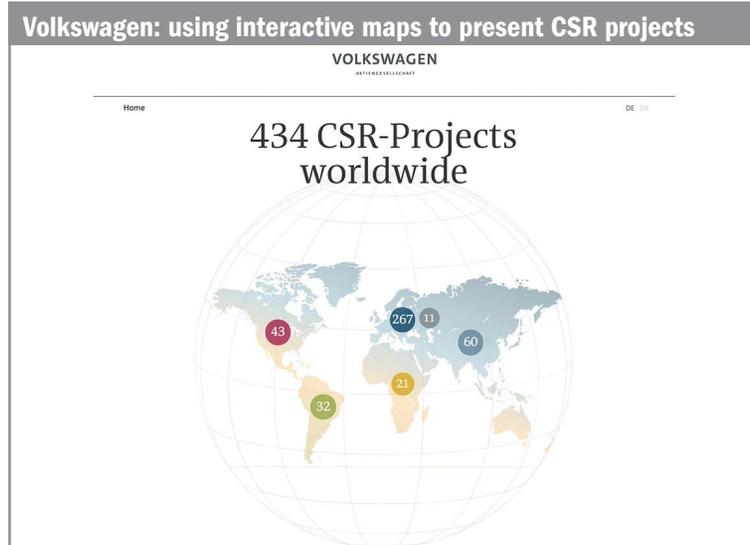
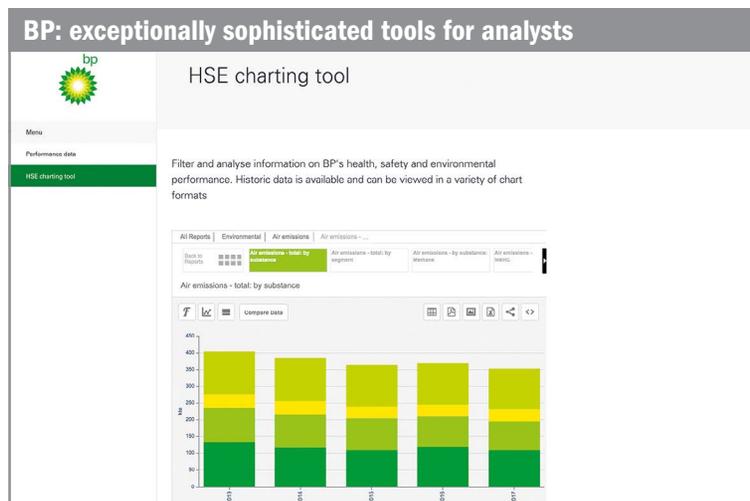
The whole **Johnson & Johnson** site is designed promote the company’s social responsibility, especially through well-presented stories, while a linked microsite tackles the controversy around talc and ovarian cancer. **Volkswagen** has been very much on the defensive, and after a slow start is now tackling the diesel emission scandal in its “Sustainability” section and in a refreshingly open online magazine, *Shift*.

Coca-Cola has an exceptionally rich sustainability section that does not avoid tough issues – for example, there is an FAQ on obesity. **Federal Express** is good at replying to unhappy customers on Facebook, though its site is designed more to bolster a feeling that its employees are part of a community, looking after each other and other people. **Union Pacific** is much the same – the site overflows with “happy family” vibes. **Texas Instruments** has a rich community section and also has a strong education area, with videos, a blog, and more.

Ask Nestlé: first line of defense

Estée Lauder Companies: underlining intentions with style

Best Practice: Non-financial Reporting Top Scorers



To evaluate non-financial reporting, we look separately in the Index at the quantity of data provided and its online presentation. Scores here reflect the total of these two metrics. These are the top performers and reasons why they are better than the others.

1st (18/20): BP

BP has an exceptionally sophisticated interactive tool for analysts that started in the “Investor Relations” section but is now used with great panache in the sustainability area. The HSE charting tool contains an astonishing amount of data covering 10 years that can be trawled in many ways, and then exported in several forms. The data is also provided in straightforward web tables, and in document form. The tool is the sparkle on top of a really serious ESG/HSE reporting effort.

Joint 2nd (17/20): Johnson & Johnson, Volkswagen, Ford, Merck

Johnson & Johnson:

The corporate website has formidable reporting. The data summary in the *Health for Humanity* (corporate responsibility) report is exceptional in its breadth: 15 pages of tables, with data often going back three years. Information is available both on the site and in PDF – the report can be downloaded in full or in sections.

Volkswagen:

The sustainability report is a PDF with a mass of detailed data and a Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) index.

The online version complements it with additional detail, including a superb CSR map leading to neatly presented information on 434 projects, while sections on both brands and regions have plenty of case studies.

Ford:

Although it is hard to find from the main corporate site, the sustainability report is a superb resource. Three-year figures are given for many metrics, while the goal achievement table is excellent. The report is easy to navigate and the PDF version can be downloaded in full, in summary or in sections.

Merck:

There is a great deal of performance data, going back five years. It is well presented on the separate corporate responsibility report website, with neat charts that build up in a box as you pass your cursor over figures – a clever way of giving a quick view of the trend. The gold dust for analysts is that the numbers can be downloaded as an Excel sheet.

Best Practice: Political Disclosure and Engagement Top Scorers

First, we look at how much corporations disclose about their reporting contributions, lobbying efforts, and other payments. Some companies have nothing at all; the top performers a great deal. The examples given are to illustrate how and why these companies edged out the others. Second, we look at how they use their online channels to engage politicians and their constituents – by stating policies, or by actively engaging with them. If companies do not engage politically, we award a proportional score – see Methodology, page 13, for more details.

Some companies outside of our top 20 are worth noting: Lloyd Blankfein, just-retired chairman of Goldman Sachs, tweeted actively and often politically, while Amazon’s blog was used to vigorously challenge Senator Bernie Sanders.

1st (17/20): Johnson & Johnson

Johnson & Johnson scores highly for political activity disclosure. A “Political Contributions” page in the corporate governance section lists its priorities and explains its approach to supporting trade associations, direct and Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions, and lobbying. Linked documents list PAC and direct payments back to 2010; trade associations supported, with numbers; and lobbying activity reported to the House of Representatives.

Joint 2nd (16/20): TI, Verizon, Pfizer

Texas Instruments is unusually open in making “Public Policy” a main section of the “About TI” section. There are clear explanations of how its political activities and contributions are handled, with links to a PAC page with details back to 2011 and a page of trade association details. “Priorities” lays out TI’s desires in the areas of growth, innovation, and competitiveness.

Verizon’s “State Government Affairs” page is a useful introduction. The political contributions documents are updated twice a year, and the archive goes back to 2008. There is a better explanation than most on how PAC support is decided. A “Policies” section links to PDF documents with high-level views on many issues, while a “Policy Blog” is specific and useful. The posts are also put out on the @verizonnews Twitter feed.

Pfizer details its lobbying and political contributions in an “Our Purpose” section, with links to PAC reports going right back to 2001. These are presented as glossy PDF documents, with introductions, statement of policy, and much detail. The 2017 document has a chunky 78 pages. The “Policy Positions” page has 14 downloadable documents on subjects that include authorized generics, patent filing, and substandard medicines.

The Explain Yourself Index Methodology

How we choose the companies

Our starting point is the 200 biggest companies in the world by market capitalization.

From this list, we take all of the American companies and European companies with high recognition in the United States (as identified by The Harris Poll).

We assign scores to the companies in this list based on three criteria – “Company information,” “Building a reputation for responsibility,” and “Serving CSR/ESG professionals.” (These are three of the 26 metrics in the Bowen Craggs global *Index of Online Excellence*.)

The companies that score best from this list are then rescored using the more granular Explain Yourself metrics (see below for full list of these and points available) to generate the final list of 20 companies.

Explain Yourself Index metrics

We evaluate the entirety of a company’s “corporate online presence”; the main global website, country sites, campaign sites and social media channels, on desktop and mobile devices.

General metrics:

- Magazine approach – how well the company tells stories [5 points]
- Usability and coherence [5]
- Visual design (5)
- Effective interaction with the public and use of social media [15]
- Use of web innovation and interactivity [5]

Company information:

- What the company does and how it is organized [5]
- The company’s approach and philosophy [5]
- Information on the leadership [5]
- History [5]

Defending and promoting reputation:

- Handling controversies (where relevant) and communicating social responsibility [25]

ESG/CSR reporting:

- How much data is provided [10]
- How well is the data presented [10]

Political disclosure and engagement:

- Reporting political expenditure [10]
- Engagement in political issues* [10]

Total points available: 120

Our scoring process

- The approach to scoring the companies in this Index is based on the process for our global *Index of Online Excellence*, a ranking of the world’s best corporate digital communicators, which we have produced since 2007, and has been published in the *Financial Times*, *Forbes*, and other prominent global business publications.
- Our analysts, experienced in both business and digital communications, make judgments at every stage.
- Our approach is “expert” rather than “checkbox”: every metric is judged on relevance and utility to the company, rather than “is it there or is it not.” The key questions are “How appropriate is it?” and “How well is it done?”
- The value for readers is in the commentary and recommendations for improvement that we provide with the scoring.

** Note about the “Engagement in political issues” metric: In cases in which companies decide not to engage in political issues, we award a proportional score for this metric that reflects the company’s overall performance. For example, if a company receives 75/110 points in the rest of the Index (68% of the total points available), it would receive 68% of the “Engagement in political issues” score, or 7/10 points (rounding up).*

About Bowen Craggs & Co

WE REVIEW. WE MEASURE. WE ADVISE.

To make your website and social media channels better for your business and your customers.

We are experts in global online corporate communications. We help you to improve effectiveness with clear strategy, expert benchmarking, market research, analytics, best practice, and content strategy. We do this for more than 50 of the biggest global corporations.

You can rely on the independence of our advice because we do not build websites or manage your online channels.

Every year we publish the Bowen Craggs *Index of Online Excellence*, which is established as the most credible ranking of large corporate digital estates, and has been published in the *Financial Times* and *Forbes*.

We have built a powerful global network for leaders in digital corporate communications at the world's biggest organizations – The Bowen Craggs Club – with regular in-person and virtual meetings, including an annual conference, as well as an online community.

Contact us to find out how you can benefit from our knowledge and expertise.



David Bowen Founding Partner

David co-founded Bowen Craggs in 2002, six years after establishing the London-based publishing and consultancy business Net Profit. In 2004 David was named one of the 100 most influential Britons in the internet's first decade. David was twice named UK national newspaper industrial journalist of the year during his seven years as industrial editor of *The Independent on Sunday*. He was also energy editor of *The Independent* and had a long-running twice-monthly column on websites for the *Financial Times*.



Dan Drury Partner

Dan is responsible for Bowen Craggs' global sales and marketing strategy. He joined in 2005 after 12 years as an internet entrepreneur. In 1993 he founded a software company that developed operational online risk management tools. Eight years later he founded a leading enterprise-class web analytics software company. Both companies had successful exits for Dan and his venture capital investors. At Bowen Craggs he has expanded the company's client base to include more than 50 Fortune Global 500 corporations and added a range of quantitative measurement services to Bowen Craggs' portfolio.

CONTACT BOWEN CRAGGS

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[linkedin.com/in/dandrury](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dandrury) • For practical advice and deep analysis, visit our website www.bowencraggs.com.

About The OCR

THE OCR

The Observatory on Corporate Reputation, or The OCR, was founded at the University of North Carolina in May 2008 during the economic collapse, by Dr. Craig Carroll, a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The mission was to advance research on corporate reputation that assisted in the social and economic development of North Carolina. Today, The OCR is a research think tank devoted to enabling the corporate affairs function of the Fortune 500 and Global Forbes 2000.

The OCR Network is an exclusive invitation-only peer-driven network of senior corporate affairs executives (CAEs) from some of the world's top companies. Gatherings provide CAEs the opportunity to engage each other on critical, timely issues.



CRAIG E. CARROLL, PH.D

Founder and Executive Director

Craig E. Carroll, Ph.D is the executive director of The OCR. A former faculty member at University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. Carroll teaches in graduate-level global corporate communications programs around the world (US, Denmark, Singapore, and Spain). Dr. Carroll has published three books on corporate reputation: *Corporate Reputation and the News Media* (Routledge, 2010), the *Handbook of Communication and Corporate Reputation* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), and the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Corporate Reputation* (Sage Publications, 2016). He is the co-author of *DICTION 7.1*, a computer-aided text analysis program that grades texts for various dimensions of tonality and rhetorical influence strategies.

Dr Carroll serves on the Communications Strategy Council for the Conference Board and on the editorial board of several leading scientific journals in corporate communication, public affairs, and corporate reputation. Dr. Carroll's global benchmarking research on digital CSR engagement has been funded by the International Association of Business Communicator's Research Foundation and published in the scientific journal, *Journal of Business Ethics*. With Rowena Olegario of Oxford University's Centre for Corporate Reputation, he is the editor of an upcoming forum on "Linking Corporate Reputation and Accountability" also in the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

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To find out more about The OCR and its network,
 visit our website www.ocrnetwork.com.

