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Online communications index

WHO'S HOT, WHO'S NOT

By [Duncan McLeod](#)

Alexander Forbes scoops top honours this year; MTN and SABMiller take a pasting

Alexander Forbes is 2005's best corporate online communicator. The financial services group beat Liberty Group and Reunert into second and third places respectively in the *FM's* annual online communications index (OCI), which determines which publicly traded SA companies use electronic communication channels to best effect.

Research firm BlueRiverStone was again commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of the online strategies of SA's top 100 JSE-listed companies by market capitalisation (as of April 5 2005). "It's important that this research is done because online channels have become a critical means for companies to communicate with a broad range of stakeholders," says MD Ian Kruger.

Alexander Forbes was 14th last year. Second-placed Liberty leapt from 40th position in 2004; Reunert was eighth. Rounding out this year's top five are Sasol in fourth place (last year 17th) and Aquarius Platinum (previously not rated). Other strong performers this year include Lonmin (89th to sixth), FirstRand (68th to ninth) and Murray & Roberts (70th to 10th).

Last year's winner, furniture group Steinhoff, fell to 14th place. Other companies that performed poorly relative to last year include SABMiller, which tumbled precipitously from third place in 2004 to third-last this year. MTN crashed from 18th to second-last - a terrible performance, given that it's a company in the communications business. Only Gold Reef City fared worse than MTN in the 2005 report, coming stone-last with a score of 47,2.

Remarkably, two companies in this year's survey do not even have websites: African Life Assurance and Mvelaphanda Group (the separately listed Mvelaphanda Resources has a website and was 52nd). African Life Assurance and Mvelaphanda Group were thus excluded from the index.

BlueRiverStone used three methods to rank the companies in the index:

- The technical quality of the websites - the researchers used Software Research's eValid, a browser-based website assessment tool. This tool measures a number of metrics, such as page size, broken links and site structure, all of which relate to the overall performance of a website and its quality. Websites were ranked according to the ease of user navigation and the quality of website maintenance.
- The usability of the websites - here the researchers built a scorecard. They measured the usefulness of websites for investors, how companies use their websites for online recruitment and how they use them for marketing purposes. Though this data wasn't used in determining the index, BlueRiverStone also found that 58% of corporate websites have no easily identifiable careers or job opportunities sections. Furthermore, it found that only 27% of websites - most of them operated by financial services companies - have relatively well developed transactional facilities.
- E-mail responsiveness - the researchers assessed the ability of companies to respond to a standard e-mail or webform inquiry in a timely manner. The quality of the responses, in terms of both the format and the content, was also measured. At least one e-mail address or webform address was extracted from each website, to which two separate e-mails were sent. The first e-mail, which was

Info Graphics


HOW THEY SCORED

Company	Score	2004	2005
Alexander Forbes	92,42	1	14
Liberty	89,98	2	46
Reunert	88,51	3	8
Sasol	88,21	4	17
Aquarius Platinum	85,92	18	5
Lonmin	84,27	8	68
Africa Healthcare	82,78	7	46
Gencom	81,98	9	36
FirstRand	80,98	9	68
Murray & Roberts	80,82	10	70
Netcom	80,82	11	10
Momentum	80,47	12	21
MTN	47,20	18	21
Steinhoff	46,20	1	1
Pick n Pay	44,27	13	31
NetPa	43,62	14	74
Stemcor Data	38,64	17	28
Sagel	35,1	19	18
Bankwest	32,98	19	1
Gold Reef City	32,98	20	28

Source: BlueRiverStone

[CLICK HERE](#) for a detailed table of this year's results, in MICROSOFT EXCEL format - available online or for download to *FM* subscribers only. The table ranks the companies surveyed and provides a statistical breakdown of how they scored in each of the categories.

[CLICK HERE](#) for a summary of the report in PDF format.

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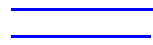
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directed at the most likely investor relations contact, asked about the availability of the annual report and the board charter. The second e-mail was directed at the public relations or media contact and asked for information on corporate social responsibility.



Technical quality and usability each contributed 40% to a company's total score . E-mail responsiveness contributed 20%.

As in previous years, response rates to e-mails were poor. Only 58% of companies replied to the investor-related inquiry and 53% responded to the public relations inquiry. A third of companies responded to both and 21% responded to neither.



A detailed table of this year's results, in Microsoft Excel format, is available to FM subscribers. [Click here](#) . The table ranks the companies surveyed and provides a statistical breakdown of how they scored in each of the categories. Subscribers will also find a [summary](#) of the report in PDF format.

For 2006, the FM and BlueRiverStone plan to make big changes to the report. Changes will be made in how we select the companies surveyed, especially so the research also caters for smaller firms. From next year, the report will be rebranded as the FM's Best Corporate Websites.



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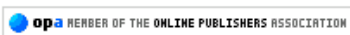
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