

# Siemens

## Compilation of the texts

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## 1 Short Portrait of Siemens and communicative situation (J.H., T.L., G.BE.)

Siemens' company history is a particularly interesting example of the history of corporate public relations in Germany, since the electrical industry in the mid-19th century was a completely new, high-growth and promising industry (see Zipfel 1997a, p. 244, and 1997b, p. 3). This industry branch – similar to the chemical industry – was not simply a modernisation of craft activities and goods that had been familiar to people since the Middle Ages. Therefore, these revolutionary branches of the economy generated new needs for self-portrayal and communication, and at the same time many questions were directed at them from the masses and differentiating sub-publics that developed especially after 1870 (cf. Bentele/Liebert 2005, pp. 234; Liebert 2003, pp. 13-29).

Companies like Siemens prove that there were already extensive activities in the area of business public relations at a very early stage. Regarding Siemens, these activities clearly exceeded methods of attracting and maintaining attention (“publicity”) and thus must be seen far beyond advertising-based methods. The industrialisation caused the necessity to convince the population of the new techniques’ and innovations’ advantages. The company founder Werner von Siemens saw himself confronted with the initial incredulity and fear of the people towards electric current.

“The introduction of new, yet unknown goods and services fundamentally changed the way of life of large parts of population to some extent with the result that merely acquisitive activities had to remain unsuccessful unless they included broad information about the new individual and social possibilities.” (Bentele/Liebert 2005, pp. 232)

The initially reserved attitude of the population and authorities as well as the necessary of building trust with the own employees required the use of various communicative techniques and instruments which are attributed to corporate communication in the form of both external and internal public relations nowadays.

Between 1847 and 1941, Werner von Siemens, his brother Carl and his sons Wilhelm, Arnold and Carl Friedrich controlled the company's fortunes. Each of them followed a very specific communication strategy, depending on political, economic and social circumstances, as well as their own style. The history of communication at Siemens has been relatively well researched in comparison to the communication history of other companies (especially Zipfel 1997b, see also Kunczik 1997, pp. 231-236)<sup>1</sup>, but there is a lack of overall descriptions and the last 50 years have not yet been covered in detail.

Siemens AG, headquartered in Berlin and Munich (corporate headquarters), is today one of the world's largest companies in the electrical and electronics industry with well over 1,500 locations worldwide and a turnover of 85 billion euros. 385000 employees develop and implement products, systems and services in almost 190 regions. The company's profit after tax will amount to 5.6 billion euros in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a case study see: *Bieler, Denise* (2010): *Public Relations und Massenkommunikation. Einrichtung von Presstellen um die Wende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 207-221. *Siemens* itself offers historical information at <https://new.siemens.com/global/en/company/about/history.html> (retrieved December 19, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Online under: <https://new.siemens.com/global/en/company/about.html> (retrieved December, 19, 2019).

## 2 Corporate history 1847-1941 (J.H.)<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 Overview 1847-1890

On 12 October 1847, *Siemens & Halske Telegraphen-Bau-Anstalt* was founded by the engineer and artillery officer Werner von Siemens and the mechanic Johann Georg Halske as the first company to manufacture exclusively electrical products. While the population in the beginning was very sceptical about the new technology, the Prussian state commissioned the company as early as 1848 to establish a secure communications link between Berlin and Frankfurt/Main. The motive for this project: King and government should be able to follow the decisions of the German National Assembly in Frankfurt's Paulskirche with as little delay as possible.

From 1850 Siemens expanded its business activities, particularly to Russia and England, where Werner Siemens' brothers Carl and Wilhelm managed the company. By 1866, when Werner Siemens discovered the dynamoelectric principle, there were no longer any limits to general electrification. Within a few decades, his company developed from a small precision engineering workshop producing mechanical bells for railways, wire insulation and, above all, electrical telegraphs, into one of the world's largest companies in the field of low and high voltage current technology.

### 2.2 Overview 1890-1941

In 1890 Werner von Siemens withdrew and left the business to his brother Carl and his sons Arnold and Wilhelm. They converted the company into a stock corporation in 1897. In 1903 the AG (Aktiengesellschaft = stock corporation) took over the *Elektrizitäts-AG* (AG = Aktiengesellschaft = stock corporation), formerly *Schuckert & Co.* Together with the heavy-current engineering division of *Siemens & Halske*, it was outsourced to *Siemens-Schuckert-Werke GmbH*. Ongoing patent disputes with the competing company AEG were ended by the foundation of a joint company for wireless telegraphy system Telefunken.

Together with two other companies, *Siemens & Halske* formed the *Osram Light Bulb Company* in 1919. From 1919 Carl Friedrich von Siemens took over the management of the company. During the First World War, the electrical industry lost its world market position. Reclaiming this position and raising capital were the main tasks of the company during the 1920s. In the following years, the triumphal success of radio began with the production of radios and television sets. Electrical household products gradually gained acceptance. During the Third Reich, however, forced organisation and state control increasingly restricted the company's decision-making scope. Nevertheless, measured by the size of its workforce, Siemens was the world's largest electrical company at the outbreak of the Second World War.

### 2.3 The founders and entrepreneurs of Siemens

*Werner von Siemens (1816-1892, head of the company 1847-1890)*

Werner Siemens was born in Lenthe near Hanover in 1816. As it was not possible for his family due to economic reasons, to finance his university studies, he joined the Prussian army in

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter is mainly based on information from the webpage of Siemens (see bibliography).

1835. He pursued an officer's career and completed a three-year training course in mathematics, physics, chemistry and ballistics.

In recognition of his scientific inventions and the services he rendered to society, Siemens was elevated to the nobility by Emperor Friedrich III in 1888. Therefore during the same year he took the name Werner *von* Siemens. Werner von Siemens saw himself first and foremost as an inventor and believed that his products should be distinguished above all by quality and make everyday life easier for users. As early as 1842, Werner von Siemens applied for a first patent for his process of galvanoplastic gilding and silver plating. In 1847, he developed the pointer telegraph, got it patented and, together with Johann Georg Halske, founded the *Telegraphen-Bauanstalt von Siemens & Halske* on 12 October 1847.

*Johann Georg Halske (1814-1890, co-founder 1847 and associate until 1867)*

Johann Georg Halske was born on 30 July 1814 in Hamburg. The precision mechanic devoted himself to the construction and design of electrotechnical devices, including the pointer telegraph. As early as 1844, Halske ran his own workshop (Werkstatt) in Berlin with his partner F. M. Böttcher. Due to unbridgeable disagreements with the Siemens brothers, he withdrew from the company in 1867. Nevertheless, he remained a friend with von Siemens and continued to be involved in the company, for example by providing financial support for the Siemens pension fund founded in 1872.

*Carl von Siemens (1829-1906, head of the company from 1890)*

In 1890 the brother Carl von Siemens and the sons Arnold and Wilhelm took over the leadership of the company. Carl von Siemens, Werner von Siemens' younger brother born in 1829, supported his brother mainly in his business in Russia. He travelled to St. Petersburg in 1853 to supervise the construction of the Russian telegraph network. Carl was considered a decisive and competent entrepreneur. As senior partner of *Siemens & Halske*, he converted the company into a stock corporation in 1897. For his earnings in Russia, Tsar Nicholas raised him to the nobility in 1895.

*Carl Friedrich von Siemens (1872-1941, head of the company 1919-1941)*

After the death of the brothers Arnold and Wilhelm, the third and youngest son of the company founder, Werner von Siemens, Carl Friedrich von Siemens took over the leadership of *Siemens AG* in 1919. He managed the company during the Weimar Republic and under the difficult economic and political conditions of National Socialism (1933-1945). During this time he tried to maintain the unity of the company and to consolidate the image of a universal electrical engineering company.

### **3 External PR incl. Press relations through the ages (J.H., G.BE., T.L.)**

#### **3.1 Overview**

Throughout his life, Werner von Siemens paid great attention to the positive image of his company. But first and foremost he saw himself as an inventor who refused to use „Reklame“

(an older German word for advertising) to present his products in a media-effective way. He believed that “really useful things will find their way and recognition anyway”. His products should be characterized by performance and facilitation of everyday life. Nevertheless, Werner von Siemens always knew how to put the services and products of his company in the right light, as long as the measures used for this purpose corresponded to his idea of a serious, public-effective appearance (see Zipfel 1997b, p. 34f.; Kunczik 1997, p. 232).

Even in these early years of the development of public relations, which at that time was still called „Reklame“ or propaganda, Werner von Siemens used a number of means and techniques to inspire every segment of society with his products and to attract financiers. Part of the company's firm PR repertoire was to combine the effect of presentation with that of cultivating relationships. Siemens implemented this by inviting important representatives from politics and business to present new products.

His career as an officer also enabled Werner von Siemens to establish valuable contacts with the imperial court. These relationships were intended to enhance the prestige of the company, and at the same time Siemens recommended himself as a competent partner in the field of electrotechnical energy. For example, he equipped the Imperial Court with electric lighting for festive balls (cf. Zipfel 1997a, p. 245ff.). Furthermore, the Empress regularly asked him to demonstrate technical innovations at her charity events. In addition, events were held in the empress's own house at which, among other things, technical innovations in the field of medicine were presented and demonstrated. Siemens invited doctors and other specialists to these events.

To convince the general public of the necessity of his technical achievements and inventions, the company founder installed the first electric street lighting in several streets of Berlin in 1880. Werner von Siemens thus attracted a great deal of public attention and at the same time advertised his products. He described this type of communication as “effect and simultaneous advertising” (Zipfel 1997b, p. 43).

*World and trade exhibitions* were one of his preferred instruments. These were always conscientiously planned and prepared by Siemens. Within this framework, it was always possible to present exhibits that were of great interest to the public. For example, the first electric elevator at the industrial exhibition held in Mannheim in 1880 transported 8,000 visitors to a viewing platform (see Kunczik 1997, p. 235).

### **3.2 Press relations of Siemens AG from the 1880s to the First World War**

Werner von Siemens maintained a critical attitude towards the press throughout his life. Nevertheless, *press and public relations activities* of Siemens could be observed quite early: As early as 1888, a small PR staff was formed around the physicist Willi Howe. This staff collected information on technical and commercial issues, catalogues and publications, and prepared suggestions for presentations and speeches to be held by Siemens at the court and in its own rooms. In 1899, the Managing Board decided to intensify press work and hired its own press officer. A “literary bureau” was created, the management of which was transferred to the writer Hans Dominik on October 1, 1900. Dominik had been working for Siemens since April 1, 1900, but left the company again in early summer 1901 (see Kunczik 1997, p. 232 and p. 242ff.; Bentele/Liebert 2005, p. 234).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Dominik (1872-1945) combined knowledge of electrical engineering (he had studied electrical and mechanical engineering) and, as a writer, the ability to express technical facts in a comprehensible and popular,

In 1902, a “central office” (Centralstelle) was set up to “concentrate the entire newspaper, advertising and news system” – as a uniform, central literary bureau with special emphasis on press relations.<sup>5</sup> On February 8, 1902, a Siemens circular announced:

“At the Managing Board’s meeting on January 31, 1902, the decision was adopted to set up a single Central Office for Press Affairs for all our German operations, and to place this bureau under the central department.” (Circular of February 8, 1902, cited after Dittler n.d.)

Such a department, which had to bundle the company's organizational communications, seemed both appropriate and necessary from the point of view of the Siemens Managing Board at the time. Between the new “Central Office”, headed by E. Neisser, and the “Literary Office”, which had been created two years earlier and continued to exist, a division of labor emerged that assigned the latter a specific and subordinate function:

“(…) the collection, processing and forwarding of product-related information and other technical services to the technical and scientific specialist media”. (Dittler n.d.)

In the course of time, press relations intensified – a necessary measure, also in order to withstand the growing competitive pressure. After the restructurings of 1903, *Siemens & Halske* set up a *propaganda office* (a common term at the time), which was later renamed *Literary Office* and, before World War I, *Literary Department* (see also Kunczik 1997, p. 234).<sup>6</sup>

### 3.3 External press relations in the changing demands of the 20th century (G.BE.)

Over the decades, external press relations have changed considerably, both in terms of organization and content. While at the beginning of the 20th century, as part of the 1913 reorganization the distinction between central corporate press relations on the one hand and sales-related press relations on the other hand was reconfirmed and continued (cf. Dittler n.d.), the insight that the external presentation of the company must be consistent and that “all communication with publication editors [...] must be conducted solely through the Press Bureau [...]” (announcement of the company management, quoted after Dittler n.d.) began to gain acceptance as early as the 1920s. Helmut Böttcher, an experienced outside journalist took over managing the bureau in 1922. He also took over the editorship of “Siemens Business Communications” (*Siemens Wirtschaftliche Mitteilungen*), which had been appearing since 1919. Later there appeared as a follow-up journal the still existing „SiemensWelt“.

This necessity is seen even more strongly after the reconstruction phase of the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e. in the 1960s, when sellers' markets developed into buyers' markets. Gerd Tacke, CEO of Siemens AG from 1968 to 1971, is quoted by Dittler, i.e. by the company's current “Historical Institute”, with the insight “that some day its public relations work would all have to be seamlessly consistent” (quoted after Dittler n.d.). The foundation of a “Central Information Office” (ZI) was the organizational answer to this insight. The ZI is the first

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“literary” way. Dominik worked for several electrical companies during his life, from April 1, 1900 for Siemens & Halske. However, Dominik soon preferred to work as a freelance writer of technical and utopian novels, from which he continued to commission work for electrical companies (Kunczik 1997, p. 243f.; Bieler 2010, p. 215). A short biography of Hans Dominik at:

<http://www.mdr.de/geschichte-mitteldeutschlands/reise/personen/artikel12284.html>

<sup>5</sup> On this organizational solution, see also Bieler 2010, pp. 215f. and 219f. There it is quoted from the minutes of the board of directors. Cf. also Dittler (n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Regarding press relations, there are thoroughly different organisation solutions recorded at Siemens, shown by the year 1913 for example (cf. Bieler 2010, pp. 217f. as well as 221). (T.L.)

“central contact and information point to provide media representatives and interested parties from the general public with product-related, technical and economic information about the company as a whole” (Dittler n.d.).

### **3.4 Outlook on communicative changes at the beginning of the 21st century (G.BE.)**

Since the 2000s, the digitalization of social communication and the associated changes in the structure and formation of the public sphere have led to a situation in which major changes in corporate communication have been and continue to be observed. In the course of focusing and integrating corporate communications more closely, this also includes the organizational abolition of the separation of external and internal communications (see Santen 2015) and the development of newsrooms since around 2015.

At Siemens, this development was accompanied by a thematic focus, individualization and an increase in the speed of corporate communications, while at the same time greater flexibility (the agile communications department in a more agile company). Clarissa Haller, the current head of Siemens Communications, highlights in 2019 as the strongest change in the Siemens Newsroom in recent years a greater diversity and a higher internationalization of Siemens corporate communications. At the same time, the development of instruments (e.g., “Trello” as a tool) will lead to better and more flexible use of such instruments in strategic planning, but also in controlling. “Real-time controlling” could be the keyword here. Cf. Haller 2019.

## **4 Internal PR from the beginnings to the 1920s/30s (J.H.)**

### **4.1 Internal Public Relations of Siemens**

The age of the Industrial Revolution not only led to successful inventions and technical innovations, but also to the development of the so-called “social question”. With the emergence of the workers' movement and the rise of trade unions, corporations such as Siemens sought ways to deal with dissatisfaction and uprisings among the working class. In addition, the workforce, as a constantly growing section of the different publics in society, had to be informed about the goals and developments in the company. This was the birth of typical instruments of internal public relations.

Werner von Siemens recognized early the importance of internal PR instruments to create a feeling of togetherness, a “corps spirit”, among his workforce. This should pay off in the constant loyalty of his workers to the company and thus the avoidance of strikes. This corporate style of “liberal patriarchalism” was based, on the one hand, on care and personal presence in the company and, on the other hand, on respect for entrepreneurial authority (see Zipfel 1997a, p. 251).

Due to the expansion of the company, personal relations with employees gradually receded into the background. The strike movement of 1904-1906 finally led to a reorientation, in which Wilhelm von Siemens tried to bind employees by intensifying anti-union social policies based on private living conditions. The first committees specifically responsible for company social and welfare policy were established.

In a third phase after the end of the First World War, Carl Friedrich von Siemens, also in view of changed economic and socio-political conditions, relied on the integration of workers through conscious social partnership and cooperation (cf. Zipfel 1997b, p. 119ff.).

## 4.2 Internal PR of Siemens AG: Instruments

Typical instruments of internal public relations at Siemens included the *employee newspaper* (in this time the company newspaper [Werkszeitung,] see Zipfel 1997a, p. 251f.) as well as *facilities related to health, retirement, education further education and training*. These included canteens, medical practices and clinics, workers' apartments, nurseries and kindergartens or company schools. Leisure and cultural offerings, such as the establishment of reading rooms, as well as organized company sports or company outings, were established (cf. Zipfel 1997b, p. 128ff.; Kunczik 1997, p. 236). In 1906, a “support association” was founded, which developed into the largest “yellow” or “economically peaceful” workers' association in Germany and, as an instrument of integration, was intended to contain the danger of strikes and riots in the Siemens Group.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the Group sought to bind its employees through targeted profit sharing and a sophisticated *bonus system*. In 1852, an internal company *health insurance* was introduced. As early as 1872, 17 years before state social security legislation was passed, Siemens was already providing pension, widow and orphan benefits (see also Vogt 2005, p. 17; Kunczik 1997, p. 236). In 1908, a Siemens company health insurance fund was established, which was also open to family members from 1922. All of these institutions were forerunners of modern social security systems and played an important role in improving health and family care within the Siemens workforce.

## 5 Appendix

### 5.1 The authors of the texts about Siemens

J.H. = Jennifer Heinrich

G.BE. = Günter Bentele

T.L. = Tobias Liebert

The original text was written by J.H. for the purposes of the seminar “PR history” under the direction of Günter Bentele and Stefan Wehmeier. J.H. submitted a corresponding seminar paper in the winter term of 2005/2006. Thanks are due to Günter Bentele and Stefan Wehmeier for a formal correction step in the meanwhile. Later, the texts were edited and completed by T.L. and G.BE. Very useful for translating the German text into English was the translation program [deepl.com](https://www.deepl.com) (<https://www.deepl.com/translator>).

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<sup>7</sup> See also Bieler 2010, S. 220.



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