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*Melding Technology & Traditional Communications Tools to Create a
Cutting-Edge Organization*

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It's great to be here among colleagues in the profession and energizing to hear from thought leaders who help us peer into the communications future.

On behalf of AARP, I'd like to first thank the organizers of the World Communications Forum for inviting me to speak.  It is an honor to be here in this spectacular setting, and I hope I can offer perspectives that are helpful to you, your businesses, and our common interest in advancing the practice of communications.

I recognize, of course, that this is a global audience so for those of you unfamiliar with AARP, we are a nonprofit, nonpartisan social change organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and to society.

AARP pursues its mission by standing up for our members as a powerful advocate on public policy issues, helping people 50+ and their communities help themselves, and leading the way in the marketplace by working with companies to develop new and better choices.

Our membership – at over 37 million – is larger than the population of Sweden, the Czech Republic, Ireland and the Netherlands – combined.

There is much to know about AARP and I invite you to visit AARP.org, at your convenience.  To set the tone for my talk today, I'd like to show a brief video clip.

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Now let me begin with a few words about disruption.  Every generation bears witness to it.  And every generation confronts a central challenge that disruption leaves in its wake:  adapting to a new order of commerce and technology.  Today's disruption – the warp speed explosion of social media and mobile communications – has created

the startling reality that we live at a moment when anybody with a cell phone can launch biggest story in the world.

So I'd like to offer two vignettes, each illustrative of where we are: in a new <u>era of engagement</u>, a time when disruption opens possibilities and pits tradition against change.

The first is about the Arab Spring – Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and now Syria. It commenced with a fruit vendor setting himself on fire, spiraled into violent confrontations between oppressed citizens and dictatorships, and segued into the toppling of regimes.

A dominant theme of the Arab Spring has been the use of social media and mobile communications. This has been so profound that it has changed how dialogue occurs, how perceptions are shaped and how relationships are forged. Autocratic leaders are having exchanges they are not accustomed to having. Constituencies are springing to life, seemingly out of thin air. Strangers with common grievances are finding each other and speaking out.

The power dynamics changed because people found the digital toolbox. Nabil Al Sharif, Egypt's former Minister of State for Communications, captured the moment best when he noted that "The most important outcome of the Arab Spring has been the destruction of the old media regime."

The second vignette, far more whimsical, is about Mr. Splashy Pants. The environmental group Greenpeace has, for years, adopted humpback whales in Antarctica, tagging, tracking and even naming them to attract more public interest in their work.

Some time ago, the organization conducted an online poll to select a name for one particular whale. Greenpeace was inclined to give the whale an exotic, indigenous name such as "Shanti." But it was another suggested name, "Mr. Splashy Pants," that went viral. Once Facebook support for Mr. Splashy Pants began to mushroom, it was game over on the poll. Splashy scored 78%, and Greenpeace came to see the many upsides of naming their whale Mr. Splashy Pants.

Two vignettes, one unifying theme:  the communications revolution – mobile and social – is now a principal driver of change across the planet – in politics, in commerce, and life as we know it.

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The current disruption has forever changed the enterprise and given it a new "cutting-edge" imperative:  authenticity.  This is what I would like to talk with you about today.

Five years ago, the thought leaders at the Arthur Page Society – an association of corporate communicators to which I belong – introduced the "authentic enterprise." For an organization to be authentic, they said, it must tell the truth, listen to the customer, manage for tomorrow, prove who they are with action, and draw character from its people, among other things.  Most importantly, the authentic enterprise would possess a strong sense of what it is and communicate this powerfully.

I would argue that the digital landscape of today has impelled the evolution of a new authentic enterprise, one that deploys communications technology to <u>deepen</u> its authenticity.

The enterprise template of today calls for the application of digital technology and advanced analytics.  Possible prizes for executing well?  Better innovation, higher productivity, lower costs, and faster growth.  But the grand prize for executing well is an enterprise that knows its core values, knows what it stands for, and parlays this into deeper connections with customers or members.

A key design theme of the digital age is that all integrated communications platforms available today – online, mobile, TV, print, radio, even face-to-face – can answer a universal consumer question:  how *relevant* is the information delivered by this medium to me and my world?  Creating relevance is now possible <u>across</u> the communications spectrum.

Engaging people is no longer about shoving marketing information under their noses. It is about <u>multi-channel conversations</u> that enable enterprises to make news, build trust, and attract followers.  Social media and mobile have only made conversations faster.  Interaction between consumers and enterprises runs so deep that it is unwise to ignore the utterances of a blogger or the dimensions of a Facebook group.

All of this is to say that being cutting-edge in this radically different communications environment calls on the enterprise to use mobile and social to scale up authenticity.

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This is an organizational culture matter. Not long ago, AARP unveiled One AARP, our take on infusing the organization with a member mindset. In part, this meant everyone in the enterprise being a reliable spokesperson, communicating its values and mission clearly, and having the capacity to influence the brand. No division ownership; no turf; no silos – just a shared commitment to deliver a meaningful member experience.

At the same time, AARP's drive to create authenticity entailed a <u>parallel</u> culture change in the <u>technology sphere,</u> along three lines: integration, analytics, and personalization.

In the space of three years, AARP has transformed itself into a "multimedia conglomerate." This transformation was set out in a strategic plan sometime ago, in which it was noted that "from inception, content should be developed with the idea that it will be distributed by multiple delivery channels." This was AARP embracing content production and delivery across platforms.

Once integration became our communications lens, innovative technology allowed AARP to meld the traditional with the new – print publications with mobile apps, for example. For AARP to deliver content to its 37 million members, where they are, we had to integrate the ways we reach them.

At the heart of AARP's culture change is analytics – gathering as much data as we possibly can about the member and then shaping life stage segments.

New analytics capabilities have raised the bar in this regard. Today, it is possible to scan the universe of consumer comments – from blogs, tweets, chat rooms, and Facebook pages – categorize them, and generate meaningful feedback. Basically, analytics give us a real-time sense of the enterprise. We always know what is going on in the 50+ marketplace, and we always have a good idea of how to respond - and thus how to shape future interactions.

The bottom line is that an enhanced ability to transform data into value has changed the business culture at AARP.  It is making us more efficient learners.

Of course, in these times, protecting consumer data has become an enterprise-risk issue.  We must safeguard privacy and personal information as we apply new communications technologies.

And on this score, I wanted to note our ongoing collaboration with Microsoft.  A few days ago, on Safer Internet Day, Microsoft and AARP released new research and came together to promote internet safety education and responsible online behavior, under the themes, "Connecting Generations" and "Online Safety is Ageless."  As a longstanding consumer advocate, AARP will remain fully engaged on this, going forward.

Lastly, personalizing content is enabling AARP to meet people where they are and make AARP 100% relevant to them and their lives.

AARP has 37 million members and serves the needs of almost 100 million people 50+.  No two members are exactly alike, and it is vital that each gets a tailored and relevant experience at every digital touch point.  The goal is to build a relationship with each member that grows with every interaction.  A one-to-one AARP experience might, for example, include a personalized portal, themed mobile applications, special publication issues, targeted advocacy messages, and social change information.  So, our organizational culture is now in "segment of one" mode.

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Has all this cultural change made us more cutting-edge?  Perhaps, in an ephemeral sense, but we like what we're seeing.  We believe we are better equipped to succeed in the era of engagement.

Put simply, we are operating like the multimedia enterprise we have become.  We produce original TV/radio programming.  We put out award-winning publications.  We blog on lifestyle issues.  We produce YouTube videos.  We offer apps for mobile devices.  We have interactive online publications, some in multiple languages.  We tweet.  Most importantly, we push out quality, relevant content to wherever people

are going, content that informs, educates, inspires and entertains, content that gets people 50+ talking, content that connects.  Social media multiplies these conversations.

On that note, please indulge me for a moment as I tout AARP's social media accomplishments during 2011.  1) We grew our follower base to over 300,000, across all AARP Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts; our collective audience reach is now more than 21 million; 2) we launched a YouTube brand channel and reached 3 million video views; and 3) our AARP Blog increased page views by 762%, visits by 1092%, and unique visitors by 848%, far surpassing our 2011 goal.

And here's the kicker:  in all my years as an AARP executive, not for one minute did I ever envision saying in public that I manage my <u>tweets</u> on "<u>hoot suite</u>" and I logged a "klout score" of 43.

Seriously, though, I believe AARP is setting itself up for the digital future. We now welcome a world in which game-changing, technology-driven innovation becomes the natural state of affairs.

If there is a buzz around AARP, it is that we are changing the way society thinks about an entire stage of life.  And buzz, I think, is the right word to describe what happened at AARP a few weeks ago.  We had a quintessential "era of engagement" experience, powered by mobile and social.

On the occasion of an iconic American TV actress's 90th birthday, AARP orchestrated a three-day multimedia celebration of Betty White, an erstwhile AARP Ambassador who pitches the joys of AARP membership to people 50+.

This meant several things:  purchasing a trend topic for Twitter; directing web traffic to the Betty White topic page at AARP.org; offering a membership discount during the three days; placing a Betty White billboard; and posting YouTube clips of Betty White promoting AARP.

Now, we knew that three days of getting Betty White on the airwaves was likely to be good for AARP, in terms of visibility, social media clicks, and even a membership bump.  But I'm not sure anyone was prepared for the staggering numbers that came in.

24.8 million people saw our promoted trend topic via Twitter. 16,300 "Happy Birthday Betty" mentions were made. An unheard of engagement rate of nearly 8% was achieved. For those unfamiliar with the "engagement" metric, it refers to the rate at which people who saw the trend replied or re-tweeted. Keep in mind that a rate of 1-2% is the norm.

On top of this, our "join" numbers were up 20% on Friday, 36% on Saturday and 42% on Sunday.

This sort of exposure for your brand in the space of three days is, by any measure, exceptional. But the bigger story of that weekend was being in circulation across so many platforms. AARP was everywhere, moving the needle on relevance.

That's one part of the story. Remember, I am supposed to be talking about melding digital with traditional. So here's another part of the story. Last month, one of our experts on financial security appeared on a major nightly news program to talk about retirement planning. This was a standard, mainstream media opportunity that she used to promote our online resources.

The day after she appeared on the program, traffic to our online "retirement calculator" spiked by nearly 2,000%. Even three days after the broadcast, the number of visits to the retirement tool was up 300%.

The point? Leveraging traditional media into a rising digital presence is a best practice.

As it always does, though, everything we do circles back to mission. AARP's experience with social media fundraising for victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake is, I think, most emblematic of how we see the perfect convergence of technology, enterprise outcomes, and social mission.

Shortly after the earthquake, AARP was contacted by our friends at HelpAge International in the UK, to see if we could assist with this urgent relief effort. We agreed to help. At around 4:45 one Thursday afternoon, we dispatched a special edition of our intranet newsletter noting our decision to match $500,000 in AARP staff and member donations to an emergency appeal for older victims of the earthquake. Five minutes later, an AARP colleague posted a message announcing the appeal on

Yammer and a little later, 40,000 people within the AARP orbit knew about it. Later that evening, another AARP colleague posted a message about the appeal on her Facebook and Twitter pages, asking her community to share the ask and donate. By early the next morning, the appeal had logged $170,000 in contributions.

Within just a couple of days, the appeal had raised $877,000, plus the $500,000 AARP match, for a total of nearly $1.4 million. In a mere fraction of the time it would have taken AARP to draft, finalize and disseminate an appeal letter, we had already reached our fundraising goal.

This is an authentic enterprise, in action, in the era of engagement.

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I believe enterprises are at their best when they are true learning organizations that show a willingness to adapt, respond to member concerns, and show humility in their interactions.

AARP has learned three things as it continues to find its footing in the era of engagement.

*One, there must be a responsive, relevant organizational 'face'/'voice' on social media.* In today's environment, everything an enterprise does is a form of communication. Every report released, every tweet, every philanthropic act, every fragment of information made public – all of it adds to or subtracts from its story and defines its public face/voice. Cultivating this face and voice is a shared responsibility.

*Two, your members or customers will talk back. You should be listening and responding.* The thinking today is that if you're asked a question and you don't respond, then why do you exist? Membership groups like AARP exist precisely to respond – to provide assistance, solve a problem or share information. Social media ups the ante in this regard. We always say, "You know you're doing social media right when it's talking back." We *want* members to tell us what they think we're doing well and not doing well – so we can respond. This is the digital age. We have to concede what was once unthinkable: full control over the enterprise message is no longer possible.

*And three, build relationships. Don't just ask people to do things or buy things.* In this digital communications environment, it is now possible to have a one-to-one relationship with every AARP member. The more intimate the relationship, the more indispensible it becomes. And the indispensible relationship is precisely what AARP is after. If AARP is indispensible in the lives of our members, we are achieving our mission – we are enhancing the quality of life as we age.

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Now, it is a foregone conclusion that the rapid pace of technological change will present new challenges for enterprises going forward. AARP is zeroing in on three.

First, we envision a customer relationship management platform that incorporates social media. Enterprises can learn more than the names, addresses and e-mails of members. By matching publicly available information on social, it is possible to expand member or customer profiles. And the upshot is the prospect of further personalizing the member or customer experience.

Second, we must continue marrying new with traditional media. We recognize the disruption in the revenue stream for print publications. So we have to be innovative all the time in designing content in ways that will reduce our reliance on print. And while more and more AARP members move to digital, millions of AARP members treasure print and can't imagine not having their *Magazine* or *Bulletin* arrive in the mail. The challenge is to keep up digitally without leaving anybody behind.

And third, AARP is keen to monetize its social media results at some point. We will experiment with new approaches in 2012 including, social join/renewal of membership, social fundraising, and sponsored, social-placement on our networks. We think approaches to this kind of measurement are only a matter of time.

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I began my talk with one vignette from the Middle East and another from the deep blue sea. They differed in tone and setting, but they were similar in a vital sense: they shined a light on authenticity. In both cases, people engaged in unprecedented ways using game-changing communications, and created new facts on the ground.

And in both cases, compelling stories unfolded, stories that aligned traditional communications and new technology.

And that is the crux of the era of engagement: putting your enterprise in the best position, technologically and operationally, to be authentic – to tell good stories that engage people, connect with their lives, and entice them to share and to make a difference.

On that note, here is one last vignette that involves AARP and its charitable arm, the AARP Foundation.

When Americans think about AARP, race cars zooming around a NASCAR track at 300 kilometers per hour is probably not the first image that comes to mind. All the more reason, we thought, why it might be an interesting idea for AARP to collaborate with auto racing superstar Jeff Gordon on the AARP Foundation effort to end older adult hunger in America. It may come as a surprise to some of you that nearly nine million Americans over 50 face the risk of hunger.

So we set up the *Drive to End Hunger*. Through 2013, Jeff Gordon's *Drive to End Hunger* Chevrolet, sponsored by AARP, will compete in 22 races each year, fueling awareness about hunger. We have been humbled by the results to date. Engagement is through the roof. Through the end of the 2011 racing season, 123,000 people had visited our interactive Drive to End Hunger tent on race days. 32 million people had been reached through Drive to End Hunger social media engagements. And total earned media impressions stood at 114 million.

The best part of the story, though, is this: more than $15 million has been raised by AARP Foundation hunger programs, and so far, nearly 6 million meals have been donated by the Foundation through local hunger relief organizations. And in cyberspace, fans created their own fundraising web pages that linked up to the Drive to End Hunger site and raised even more money.

At the end of the day, it remains, for us, about how we can make life better as we age. If we want to create social change, we need to communicate authentically *and* use new technologies in powerful ways. Doing so, I think, has helped AARP find our place in the new era of engagement.