

PR SENSE

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India's First Corporate ezine

Issue No 41 – July 2009

Published by Prime Point Foundation



TN Ashok

Theme of this Issue
Magic of Perception

Guest Editor
TN Ashok

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PR-e-FACE: From the desk of Editor-in-Chief

Internal perception leads to external perception



On behalf of the Editorial Team, I thank all the readers and well wishers for their support and feedback. "Perception" of the stakeholders in Business and individual life, has always played a greater role in achieving success. As a Communication professional, I have always found that many of the Corporates assume the 'perception' of the stakeholders, be it employees or customers, without properly going through scientific measurement process. "Internal perception" always plays a significant role in developing 'external perception'. This issue deals with the "Magic of Perception".

In this issue, we also deal with the concept of "Image Audit", a tool to measure the 'hidden perception' of the stakeholders. Mr Richard Gaunt, a Senior London based Professional has shared his

experiences. In the third week of July, 2009, there was a media breaking news about 'frisking of Dr Abdul Kalam', former President of India by Continental Airlines. We conducted an online snap study to quickly analyze the perception changes of general public, if any. We are presenting this case study from a perception viewpoint.

In the competitive environment, all the organizations try to capture 'mind space' of the stakeholders. This can be achieved only through quality products/services. It is also reinforced by the personal experience of the stakeholders with the organisation. Robotic activities cannot ensure positive perception with the stakeholders.

K. Srinivasan

Guest Editor



TN Ashok, is a former Economics Editor of the wire service, PTI and Associate Editor of the German Logistics Magazine DVV Log India and noted corporate consultant having delivered strategic solutions for institutions such as ALSTOM, TATAs, Alcatel, Xerox, ATMA, KCL Foods, Authentix and several others.

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PR-e-FACE: From the desk of Guest Editor

Perception can lead to Image and Reputation

Perception. Hmm, what a magical word. It means a whole lot of things to a whole lot of people. I call it magical because the word leads to a lot of dimensions with tremendous implications. Let me just begin by saying that perception is probably best defined as a measured feeling about a thing, a person, an event, institution based on some societal norms or value judgement. Perception automatically leads us to the next stage, imaging of the same in the above categories consequently reinforced by a standard of reputation.

So perception can lead to: Image and Reputation. Consequence for the one perceived: Management. Reputation management and Image Management.

Perception can be viewed at different levels. Perception by the public of an individual, a celebrity or a vip, an institution - a political party, a corporate, a financial institution or service provider -- transportation - Railways, Airlines, Hotels, Restaurants, Banks, Insurance companies, Telephone companies, etc, Government, NGOs and so on at a common or popular level.

What leads to perception of these entities? It is perhaps the manner in which they have conducted themselves while dealing with the public. Efficiency, promptness, delivery on time, delivery on promises or on assured returns. When they are on the dot on the deliverables, they generate good perception. When they fail they generate bad perception about themselves.

I don't want to sit on value judgement over any person or individual, but it is imperative for me to mention that certain

institutions or celebrities generate good perception and certain others don't. Money making celebrities take to philanthropic activities to present a clean image and institutions shoulder good corporate social responsibilities,

Before I conclude, I have only one question to ask of myself or the readers of this e-zine. Are the norms on which perception is based in society right in the first place? If it's not what is the right mode or definition. I can only think of an example. While classical musicians such as Bach, Beethoven, Handel or Schubert were venerated during their times and even today their compositions soothe our nerves after a hard days work, a contemporary, Muzorsky, think from Poland, was dismissed as a mad man. But his compositions were subsequently resurrected by subsequent generation of great musicians to be hailed as masterpieces. Muzorsky was far ahead of his times.

Here is a case of perception going awry during a time line and getting it right in another.

The Nazis stood trial at Nuremberg for their genocidal acts during World War II for their heinous crimes particularly against one community, the Jews. But they were perfectly normal human beings at home loving their families, pets and enjoying music. What an aberration in their characters. Different Perceptions. If the Nazis had won the war, would they have been heroes - what a grotesque thought in the first place. So what's Perception all about?

TN Ashok



PRestige:

Perception Survey helps to improve Management style

Perception is a key to success if one knows the pulse of the perceiver. Whether it is an individual at the level of a celebrity or an administrator like the government or a government body or a corporate, all of them need to know the pulse of perceiver to move ahead with their programmes successfully. . Here in this exclusive interview , Richard Gaunt, CEO of Bench Point, London, UK, talks to our guest editor , TN Ashok, the Guest Editor, on the various issues that go to form perception and on the fundamentals on which it is based – even dismissing arguments that there is a right or wrong perception. Excerpts from the interview:

What is perception? What is the basis of perception?

Perception is a series of often strongly held views, based on a person's understanding of what he/she believes to be true, based on information or images received, or events witnessed. It can differ from reality because of inbuilt bias or prejudice, incomplete, unclear or misleading information. But the important thing to remember is that, for the subject, perception equals reality.

How do we assume that a person's perception is right or wrong?

There is no such thing as a right or wrong perception. You can determine people's perceptions by asking them questions and seeing if their perceptions differ from yours – or what you would like them to believe.

Is perception based on standard parameters or definitions? How does it differ from Corporates to individuals?

No. When different people with similar perceptions coalesce together they can begin to act in a corporate way, like a political party or a protest movement. The movement can become very powerful, depending on the strength of the perceptions.

How important is internal perception for any organisation? How is it formed by employees?

Every organisation should be concerned that it is perceived in a positive way by its various stakeholders, and this is the whole basis of the public relations industry. The creation of long term relationships based on a common understanding and perception is the aim of most public relations strategies. Internal perceptions derive most of all from employees' contact with the owners or managers of an enterprise. They will judge against their own standards of behaviour, honesty, fairness, and form conclusions. They will be influenced not only what they see and hear, but also by the actions and comments of others. Attempts by senior members of the organisation to change perceptions will be weighed against their credibility and persuasiveness. Employees who have a good perception of their employer are more likely to behave positively towards customers and act as good ambassadors of their organizations.

What is the fundamental difference between internal and external perception for an organisation? Is there any conflict of interest between the two?

I don't think there is a fundamental difference. There may be degrees of difference, but not fundamental ones. You will get a conflict of interest when the shared internal perceptions of a flawed



company (Enron) clash with the shared perceptions of customers and the general public. That's an extreme case, but it holds good for any company which allows its internal and external perceptions to get out of step.

To what extent does external perception add to the value of reputation of any organisation? How can the institution build the brand based on the reputation it has already earned?

Some of the world's most successful organisations are worth far more than the actual value of their assets. This "goodwill" is measurable, and can be seen as the premium which is added to the asset or share price when the company or brand is sold. A large part of this goodwill is reputation based, and is built up painstakingly over the years. A good reputation is a priceless asset for a company or an individual. How can you build reputation? By solid performance, good behavior, honest dealing, clear communication and becoming a part of the community you serve. Ask Coca-Cola or Proctor & Gamble?

What is the indices of measurement of perception, so as to come to a conclusion that the perception is along with the right direction?

Measurement indices will vary from company to company. For me, simplest is best, so I prefer a correlation between familiarity and favourability. How well do you know an organisation? How highly do you regard it? What is the ratio of one to the other?

How to measure the internal and external perception of the stakeholders?

Bob Worcester, founder of MORI, perfected the art of the image or perception survey. He asked a series of questions about how people perceived an organisation, products, performance, values and culture, and also how much they knew about that organisation. Sometimes he asked people to confirm if they believed certain statements about a company or its products were true or false. This remains the classic model for a perception survey. There is an art to the questions, and an art to the analysis.

A perception survey can help an organisation understand the cultural barriers which are preventing it from being successful in its chosen markets, and point the way to improvements in management style, culture and the way it communicates with its stakeholders.

Richard Gaunt may be reached at gaunt@benchpoint.com

How external perception gets formed?

If you know a company has, for the most part, behaved well, and know something of its size and organisation, then you are more likely to discount scurrilous stories about it. External perceptions can be heavily influenced by the behavior of other companies in the same sector (which in any case often have a tendency to behave in the same way). If the press features a story about an insurance company which refuses to pay up, it will affect the standing of all insurance companies – *Richard Gaunt*



Image Audit, a step away from making you successful.

What is image audit, one might ask? Simply said, it is a logical extension of your regular auditing of accounts, cost, stock, health, finance. If regular auditing deals with accounting principles, image audit deals with the precepts of how public image is plotted on definitive scale among your stake holders.

Normally, public image to be audited would relate to employees of an organisation, customers of a commercial entity, shareholders of a corporate, suppliers, media, government related authorities etc. Image audit is a tool which will help you to measure in a scientific way how people at large perceive you. Such an audit would help a corporate to take decisions based on perceptions of his shareholders, clients or vendors or suppliers or customers, a government as voters or the public opinionate.

Often, governments or corporates or public entities take decisions based on their own assumptions of perceptions of people about themselves, which has never been measured scientifically, and often taking you on the wrong path. A new product launch based on such ill conceived ideas can land the company in a disaster or a government policy decision can infuriate the people.

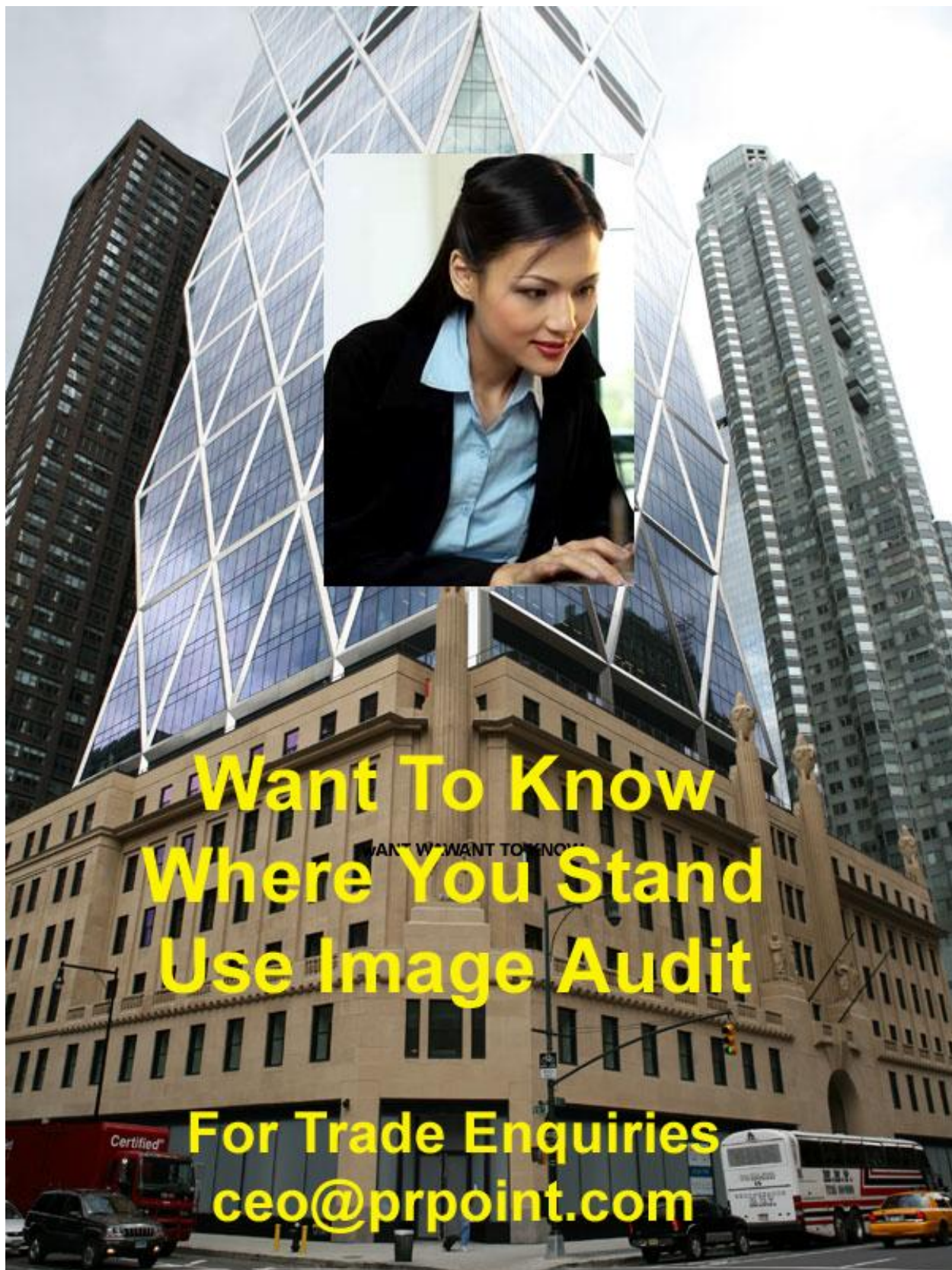
To safeguard, it's always wise to have an image audit and feel the pulse of the people and take decisions instead of taking actions based on self proclaimed or imagined judgements.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9q2eEGx9FQI>

- T. N. Ashok, Guest Editor

Internal (employees) perception is very important in an Organisation. Employees are the brand ambassadors. They play significant role in creating positive 'external perception'. Internal perception only can help to manage the crisis situation. Any effort to study 'external perception' without studying the 'internal perception' through 'Image Audit' will not be of any help.





**Want To Know
Where You Stand
Use Image Audit**

**For Trade Enquiries
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CONTINENTAL AIRLINES – A CASE STUDY

Background

A 'hidden perception' amongst the third world countries that USA is a dominant nation uncaring for others sentiments, may be right or may be wrong, but it has generated a lot of heat and debate even on genuine agreements. Serious MoUs are coming under scrutiny after being looked at with suspicion. The Barack Obama Administration is hardput to reverse this perception by working double time. The recent '*Kalam frisking issue*' has, one can say, frustrated Obama's efforts to correct the image of USA as a universal policeman.

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam is one of the most respected Indian leaders most venerated by the country's youth who consider him as an absolute 'role model'. Kalam is also looked at India's 'Missile man', since he helped developed India's defensive missile technology and oversaw the peaceful Pokron II, underground nuclear test. Recipient of India's highest civilian award 'Bharat Ratna', Kalam rose to the highest office of the land, the President of India. So popular was he that he earned the sobriquet, "People's President".



Under Indian VVIP protocol, Former Presidents are exempt from frisking in Indian Airports. The protocol conforms to the guidelines issued by government controlled Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). When Dr Abdul Kalam boarded a flight to the USA by that country's *Continental Airlines* on 21st April 2009, the airlines security frisked Dr Abdul Kalam in full public glare at Delhi Airport in utter violation of VVIP protocol on security checks, overruling Indian security's strong objection.

Dr Kalam was made to remove his coat, his belt, and the contents in his coat and trouser pockets were subject to scrutiny. The last straw on the camel's back came when his shoes and socks too were asked to be removed for further scrutiny. This act

Dr Kalam was made to remove his coat, his belt, and the contents in his coat, trouser pockets, shoes & socks were subject to scrutiny.

was nothing short of publicly humiliating the former President, who is an 'Icon and Role Model' for one billion Indians. And there was not a whimper of protest from the modest Dr Kalam who complied with the airline's security check, though he was fully aware vvip protocol was being breached by the airline.



The Indian government reacted sharply and justly to the incident on 9th July 2009 when it issued a show cause notice to Continental for violating Indian protocol guidelines on Indian soil while frisking the former President. The Airlines did not first respond. But on 21st July 2009, the TV and electronic media broke the news raising nation wide indignation. Since Indian Parliament was in session that day, the Prime Minister and the Civil Aviation Minister led members of both house houses of the bicameral legislature in unanimously condemning the incident and demanding severe action.

Within a few hours, it generated so much heat and debate, an entire nation stood up to protest Continental Airlines' arrogant attitude and some even went to the extent of calling for a boycott of the airlines flights from India.

Even at this stage, Continental did not heed an enraged nation's sentiments. A junior officer of the airline issued a Press Note defending its action quoting guidelines issued by US TSA (Transport Security Administration). The airline

claimed it did not have any special privileges for VIPs when it came to security. Even the TSA issued a similar statement from US.

Continental's casual approach further angered the public particularly the youth. So, on 22nd July 2009, Indian Government filed a police complaint against the airlines for violating Indian guidelines. The police action could eventually lead to six months imprisonment and a penalty of \$1 million. Social networks were flooded with condemnation calls against the Airlines, particularly from the younger generation, calling for a boycott of the airlines.

Within a few hours, it generated so much heat and debate, an entire nation stood up to protest Continental Airlines' arrogant attitude

Apparently, sensing trouble from any police action, and to avoid any loss of public image and consequent loss of business, the Airlines swiftly sent an apology to the Government and to Dr Abdul Kalam

personally. Though the apology is on record, the issue is still live, as police investigation is an ongoing process.

Please read further about the online survey on this issue.

Online snap perception survey

The time was ripe for us to conduct an 'online survey' on 23rd July 2009 to find out how perceptions change, based on this issue. There were 116 respondents, 75% of whom knew about the airline before the incident. Almost all the respondents had a neutral or positive perception about the airline, before the 'Kalam issue'. We found that excepting four respondents, others changed their perception about airline to the extent of even avoiding it in future. And all because, the Airlines did not respect a nation's sentiments. Though we were flooded with responses, we are reproducing some of them below.



RESPONSES

Sivakumar, VA, US sivaabc@yahoo.com

So called "American Diplomacy" and its arrogance and thinking as if they are the World Big Brother or Saviour

ratap Kumar S, Dubai, UAE pratapk2005@gmail.com

Of course this is the arrogance of US. Mr. Kalam was frisked by then with an intention to insult Indians, knowing full well that he was the Former President of India. This should not be tolerated and they should be punished heavily.

Prabhu G, Bangalore India, prabhu.govvindarajan@gmail.com

The typical western stereotype towards India. India is always perceived as a (so called) third world state and the typical western (American) arrogance that the western Corporates are superior to anybody on earth. Coexistence and Co development would always be a paper tiger and a potent weapon to cheat the poor and the needy.

Parvish Andani Kamat, Goa – India kamatp@ankaservices.com,

Arrogant staff and colonial mindset of the corporate airline

Jolly, New Delhi, India, apsjolly@gmail.com

Will never fly Continental again... Shame on them... They have insulted all Indians by not respecting Dr Kalam.

Balamurugan, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia balapriya2006@yahoo.com

The action of the airline is highly condemnable. A strong protest needs to be lodged against such "racial" discriminations that too against "The Missile Man" in Indian soil.

Subbu Srinivasan, USA, subbuviji@hotmail.com

ContAir operations should be banned in India. Indians Boycott flying/working in this airline.

Sulosana Karthigasu, Singapore, sulosana.karthigasu@gmail.com

It appears that the PR personnel were ignorant of current issues, and were rolling out standard operating procedures and responses without analysing and applying the rules to the particular incident. In other words, robotic responses - as a programmed machine would do.

Santhosh Kumar, Vilaspr (CG), India sk230668@yahoo.co.in Dr Kalam is not only Ex-President but a world famous technocrat and ideal hero of 110 crores. Airline should be banned in India without any further delay.



Our Comments and observations:

1. As we discussed already, perception is based on the actions and inactions of the organisations. When Dr Abdul Kalam, an iconic personality of India was travelling in Continental Airlines, their staff should have done some home work on Indian protocol and adhered to it by treating him with dignity, instead of virtually striping him in public. This has angered the entire Nation.
2. The airlines should have responded to the Notice issued by the Indian Government and settled the issue without getting into the media. Their silence has further complicated the issue.
3. Even when the Parliament was debating the issue and the entire World Media was discussing this issue, the Airlines should have apologized, instead of issuing a robot like routine statement by a junior level officer.
4. The Airlines realised the seriousness of the issue and its commercial impact only later. Then they climbed down on their stand and sent an apology letter, which should have been done earlier. Still the issue is live in the minds of the people.
5. The entire episode has strengthened the perception of Indians of USA's 'Uncle Sam' big brother attitude and role of universal policeman. Now unfortunately Continental Airlines and TSA have brought 'negative perception' against the USA through their action. Their action has made the public to perceive it as an "American ploy to belittle India", which may or may not be true.

Moral of the story



Every action of the organisation or individual has the potentiality of changing the perception drastically. Respect the law of the land and also the sentiments of the people where you serve. Robotic responses can worsen the situation. Accept mistakes with grace and in time, to help avoid perceptions deteriorate.

By K. Srinivasan, Editor-in-Chief, PR-e-Sense editor@corpezine.com



PRince

BY - TRIAMBAK SHARMA

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Breaking News: Former Indian President Dr A P J Abdul Kalam frisked at Delhi Airport by US based Continental Airlines



**We heard that he is "Missile Man"...
we were searching "missiles" in his
pockets... in clothes... in shoes...**

Never form an impression without personal perception

We were assisting an organization in creating a strong brand image. In a span of two years we were highly successful in creating a strong and positive image for this organization. The chief of this organization has a high reputation [an image that he has carefully built over the years by projecting certain mannerism] in the society. I was totally floored by his persona and awestruck in all the initial meetings and interactions with him, but as time lapsed, I slowly realized that this image was just a façade, which he utilized to create an unified opinion and stimulate a certain behavior among all those who came in contact with him. My perception about this man was wrong. I also discovered how he cunningly uses his positive image, to spread rumors and misunderstandings about others around and tarnish their image in other people's mind.

My conclusion: one can get deceived by first impression; but never form a perception about anyone or anything unless you experience it yourself.

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PRETTY

What you say can be perceived wrongly

Two Italian men got into a bus in London . They sat down and engaged in animated conversation. The lady sitting next to them ignored them first, but her attention was galvanized when she heard one of them say the following:

'Emma comes First. Den I come. Den two asses come together. I come once-a-more! Two asses; They come together again. I come again and pee twice. Then I come one lasta Time.'

The lady could not take this any more. 'You foul-mouthed sex-obsessed pig,' she retorted indignantly. 'In this country, we don't speak aloud in public places about our sex lives.'

'Hey, coola down lady,' said the man. 'Who talkin' abouta sex? I'm a Justa tellin my frienda how to spell " MISSISSIPPI " '

Source: unknown



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