



## Everyone lives by selling something.

The caption quotation by Robert Louis Stevenson is as true today as it was centuries ago.

Most engineers are lamentably poor at selling their worth to the outside world. Most seem happy just to get on and do a decent job leaving the politics, often the finance and always resolution of the public opinion to someone else – big mistake. Big, big mistake.

George Stephenson was in and out of parliament himself in 1825 to get our first railway built (Manchester and Liverpool). Telford, Brunel, Macadam and countless others were used to being the star turn as an acclaimed expert at promoting their projects. Often the financial backing depended on a big civil engineering “name”. So where are we today?

The end of January’s NCE editorial struck up a similar note about engineers needing to speak out. We have more than a job – we actually change the world but who recognises this? Those that get briefed on proposed change tend to pick up the messages, often wrong, from others. Take three shining examples still in the news where the messages have been scrambled so much they risk destroying their own project intent:

1. HS2 – instead of pointing out the M1 is full and it is standing room only on trains up north the world believes the project is about saving 20 minutes to Birmingham
2. Heathrow Airport – whilst 99% of residents moved in as neighbours to an airport (that actually has got quieter over time due to improved engine technology) all we hear about is the loss of a few uninspired semi-detached as against defending London’s role (that means thousands of jobs) against our European competitors.
3. Somerset Levels – yes they are flooded. Yes it is misery for a few but the area always did flood to the point that the county itself is named after the Saxon “Summer People” who only ever came in after the winter floods dried up. Now it is apparently the Environment Agency’s fault that we had rain and it settled in the lowest lying land the way it always did.

Technical experts at the front line should put significant effort into briefing their politicians prior to any press interview. Remember it is bad news stories, puffed up disasters and doomsday scenarios that sell papers. Civil engineers and transport planners have been easy targets. They don’t fight back, they concentrate on techy stuff and always go on the defensive.

Get out there. Sell what a good job you are doing. Get engineering appreciated and maybe you might get a little more respect or even a pay rise. I started this blog with a quote so will end with one – please for your own careers, just think about it :- *The brave may not live forever, but the cautious do not live at all.*” – Richard Branson



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