

# Digital Diplomacy & The #G8

---

Portland

# Foreword

Mark Flanagan | Partner, Portland



It's said that late medieval Europeans believed that the first diplomats were angels who carried messages between heaven and earth.

In the 19th Century, diplomats operated in conditions of utmost secrecy and supreme formality.

Only after World War II did the 'usual channels' begin to open up with more emphasis on public advocacy and the personal relationships between leaders. Diplomats even started to call one another by their first names.

Now, in the 21st Century, the model of diplomacy must evolve once again to reflect a world in which all of us have the tools and ability to become players and participants.

In foreign policy circles, there's been considerable buzz about digital diplomacy, yet very little understanding of the impact it may or may not be having.

## Social media presents a new kind of foreign policy challenge.

Take the recent G8 Summit - a kind of Glastonbury for diplomats. We analysed data during the run in and out of the meeting to see what role Twitter played in shaping the debate.

Was David Cameron's agenda of the three T's (Tax, Trade and

Transparency) merely a soundbite or did these messages resonate with key audiences?

How many fresh voices are being heard beyond the politicians and celebrities? For instance, in the lead up to Lough Erne there was a relatively low level of tweets until Angelina Jolie joined in to promote her campaign against sexual violence in war zones.

Was the Twitter debate around the G8 a truly global one? Our research suggested that the UK and US dominated but reach extended as far as Canada, Mexico and Kuwait. On the broader issue of the role of

---

technology in foreign policy, we have also gathered together three of the most influential voices around.

Portland's Jimmy Leach was previously head of digital diplomacy at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. He points out that, for countries like the UK, social media presents a new kind of foreign policy challenge: how do you deal with rogue ideas as well as with rogue states?

Britain's Ambassador to Lebanon, Tom Fletcher, is a living example of a new kind of creature: the Naked Diplomat. As Tom says, future diplomats will need to learn the language of this new terrain in the way he or she has learnt Chinese or Arabic.

Finally, Lovisa Williams from the Digital Diplomacy Coalition in Washington, suggests technology will require the creation of a truly global diplomacy community.

As Q said in *Die Another Day*; "it's called the future, so get used to it."

***Mark Flanagan is a Partner at Portland. He was formerly Head of Strategic Communications, working for the Labour and Coalition governments.***

# Introduction

---

Portland analysed Twitter data from around the world in the weeks running up to, during and immediately following the 39th G8 conference.

Activity between 1 April - 23 June, featuring any tweets from around the world with either #G8 or #G8UK, was analysed.

The graphic of top ten hashtags shows both the total number of tweets for each of the top ten most discussed hashtags, as well as a breakdown within this list by percentage.

When analysing activity on a weekly basis, the top ten topics by hashtag were broken down, as shown on the volume over time graphic.

Any tweets with geolocation data were included in the tweets by country graphic, with the 50 most active countries featured on the map.

# Key findings

---

## **Diversity of interest groups**

The UK government's campaign around Tax, Trade and Transparency managed to gain traction but long-standing issues such as Syria, Turkey and the Occupy movement remained significantly more prominent

## **Tax leads the 'Three Ts'**

Within the UK government's campaign around Tax, Trade and Transparency, the issue of tax achieved the most resonance by a considerable margin

## **The power of celebrity**

Celebrity endorsement is a powerful means of cutting through the Twittersphere. Conversation on sexual violence, for example, spiked following Angelina Jolie's widely reported comments

## **Short-term spikes characterise Twitter engagement**

Twitter interaction related to the G8 spiked around the summit but there was little sign of a successful campaign of engagement and debate in the run-up to the summit

## **The UK and US dominated Twitter at Lough Erne**

The reach of the G8 through Twitter remains truly global with tweets coming in from almost every country in the world, with the US and UK serving as hotspots of Twitter activity

## **A new model of diplomacy**

Officials and governments take digital diplomacy very seriously and invest considerable resources in Twitter engagement around major set piece events such as the G8 summit

# Graphic:

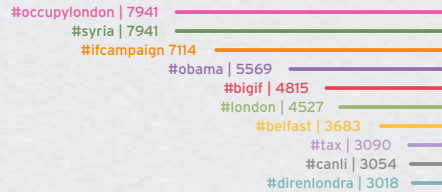
## Top ten hashtags

In the 12 weeks running up to the G8, the Occupy London movement and Syria gained the most traction. The IF campaign also generated considerable cut-through.

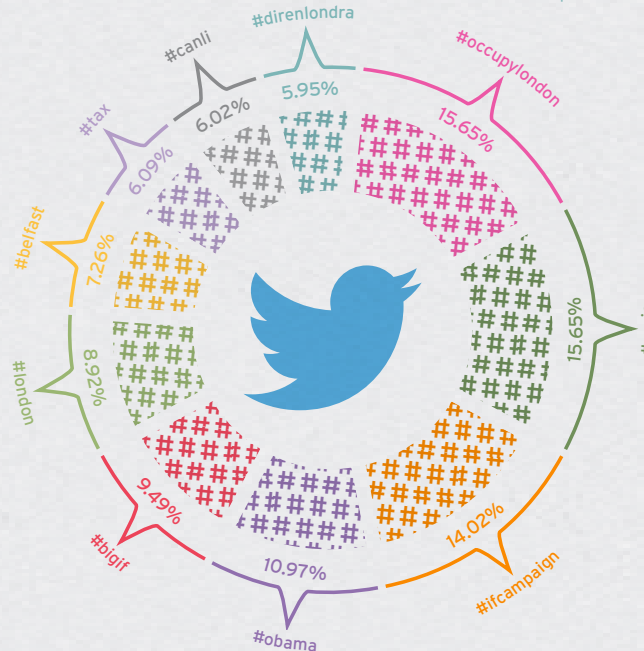
Overall, the range of hashtags relating to the G8 was extremely varied. The online debate was not being steered effectively to any one topic in the weeks preceding the summit.

The UK government's campaign around Tax, Trade and Transparency only managed to enter into the top ten hashtags on the issue of tax.

Tensions in Turkey also made a considerable impact around the G8, highlighting the ability of campaigners to piggyback on the G8 through Twitter as a means to raise awareness. The Turkish #Canil and #Diren hashtags (which translate into 'resistance' and 'live', respectively) both made it into the top ten hashtags by volume.



Top ten hashtags by number of tweets



Breakdown of top ten hashtags by percentage

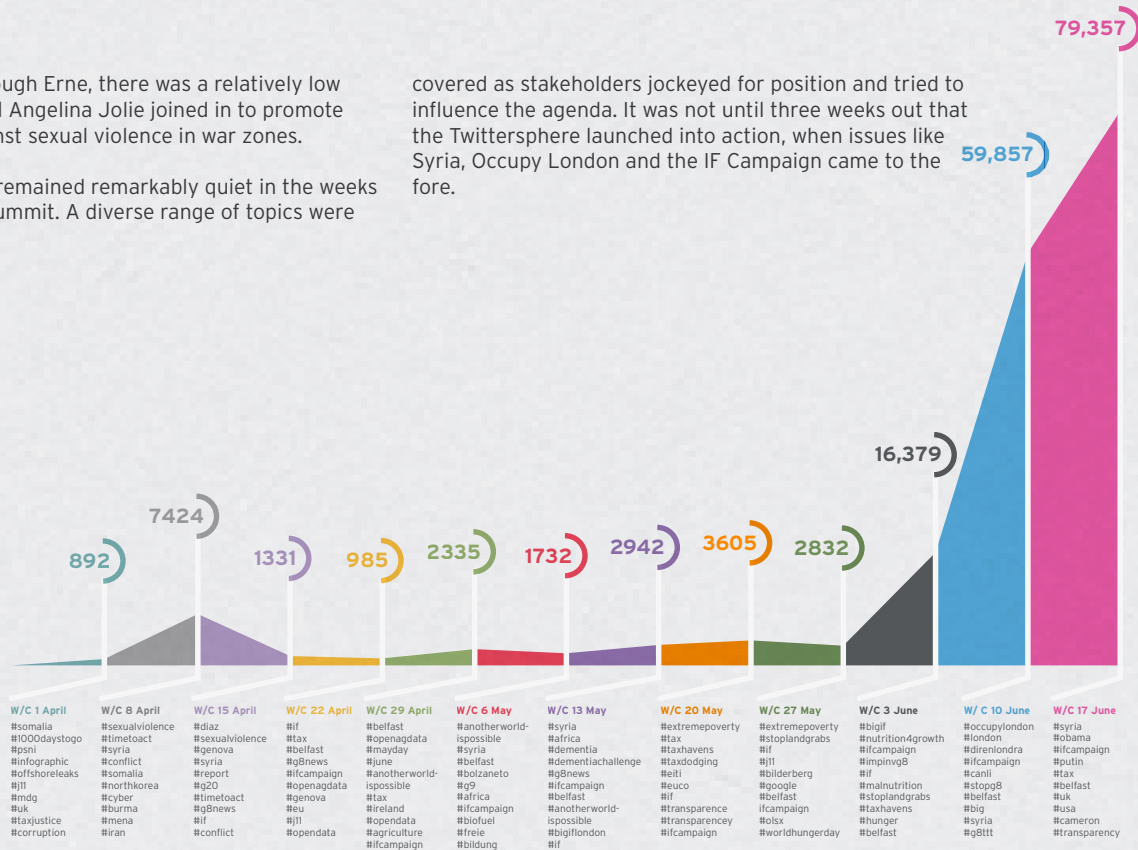
# Graphic: Volume over time

In the lead up to Lough Erne, there was a relatively low level of tweets until Angelina Jolie joined in to promote her campaign against sexual violence in war zones.

The Twittersphere remained remarkably quiet in the weeks leading up to the summit. A diverse range of topics were

covered as stakeholders jockeyed for position and tried to influence the agenda. It was not until three weeks out that the Twittersphere launched into action, when issues like Syria, Occupy London and the IF Campaign came to the fore.

Conversations by topic over time  
between 1 April and 23 June

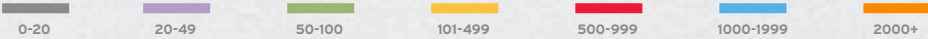
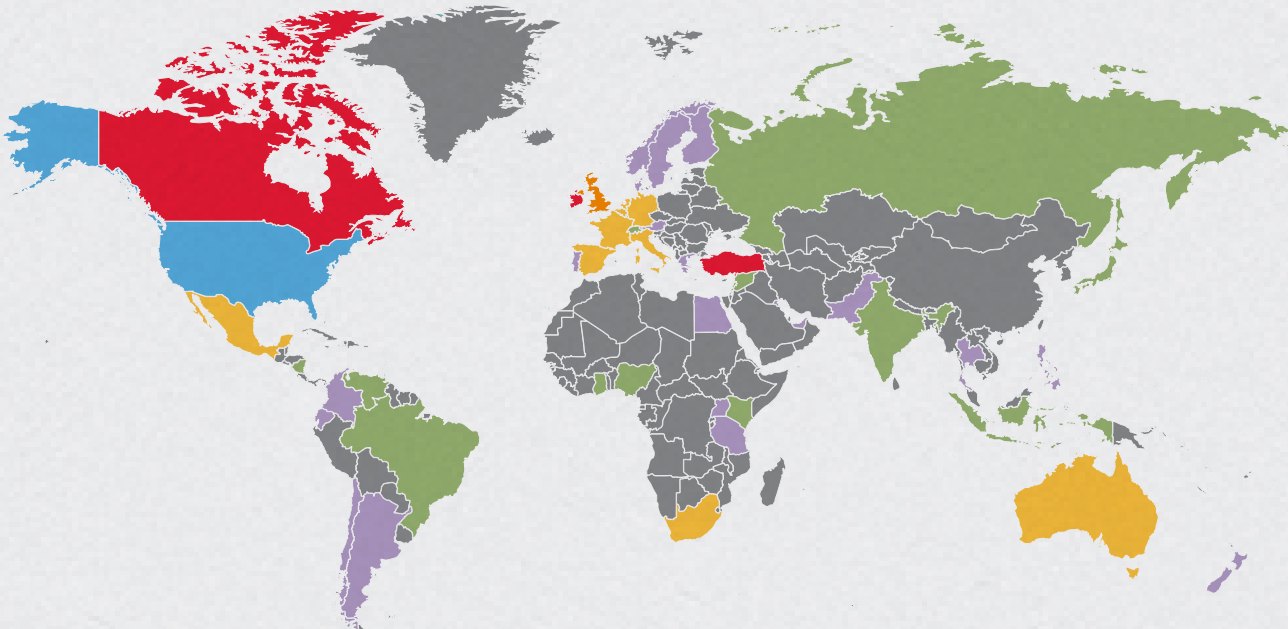


# Graphic:

## Tweets by country

### Top 10

UK	5006
US	1558
Ireland	728
Turkey	543
Canada	525
France	469
Italy	385
Germany	296
Spain	275
Mexico	214





# Naked Diplomacy

Tom Fletcher | UK Ambassador to Lebanon



@HMATomFletcher

**T**he iGeneration has more opportunity than any generation before to understand their world, to engage with their world and to shape their world. In the ten years since 9/11 that world has been transformed more by American geeks in dorms than Al Qaeda operatives in caves.

It was citizens who took the technology and turned it into something extraordinary. In years to come, people will say that the most powerful weapon in the Middle East was not sarin gas or Iran's bomb, but the smartphone. We have seen the power of the best of old ideas allied with the best of new technology: regimes can ban the iPhone, but iFreedom will get through in the end.

This new context changes everything. Increasingly, it matters less what a Minister or diplomat says is 'our policy' on an issue - it matters what the users of Google, Facebook or Twitter decide it is. As the rock star of digital diplomacy, Alec Ross, says - networks are replacing hierarchies.

Diplomacy is Darwinian.

We evolved when sea routes opened up, empires rose and fell, the telephone came along. Some said you could replace the FCO with the fax. Well, we saw the fax off, and the telegram. Now we have to prove that you can't replace the FCO with Wikipedia and Skype. Equipped with the right kit, and the right courage, diplomats should be among

pioneers of this terrain. We're already writers, advocates and analysts. We must now become digital interventionists.

Jamie Oliver, as the Naked Chef, pared back cooking to the essentials. The Naked Diplomat has a smartphone to protect

## Networks are replacing hierarchies.

his modesty. But also the skills that have always been essential to the role: an open mind, political savvy, and a thick skin. He or she will learn the language of this new terrain in the way he or she has learnt Chinese or Arabic.

---

Set piece events are being replaced by more fluid, open interaction with the people whose interests we are there to represent. I ask colleagues who are not convinced about the power of these tools to imagine a reception with all their key contacts. You would not delegate it, stand quietly in a corner, or shout platitudes about warm bilateral relations. You would be in the mix, exchanging information. With or without the Ferrero Rocher.

Some practical examples. We're aiming to use online dating technology to link UK producers with one of the world's most powerful trading networks - the Lebanese diaspora. Crisis/contingency preparation now relies increasingly on social media. We judge that it is not now worth doing a speech unless it is reaching, via social

media, over 1000 people. We've done a virtual dinner, live streamed to involve thousands of Lebanese, and the first 'tweet up' between an ambassador and a Prime Minister. One of our blog posts reached 1 in 10 Lebanese citizens.

But the most important thing social media does for us is that, for the first time, it gives us the means to influence the countries we work in on a massive scale, not just through elites. This is exciting, challenging and subversive. Getting it wrong could start a war: imagine if a diplomat tweeted a link to an offensive anti-Islam film. Getting it right has the potential to rewrite the diplomatic rulebook. A digital

démarche, involving tens of thousands, will be more effective than the traditional démarche.

I think, like the best traditional diplomacy, iDiplomacy comes down to authenticity,

## **Tweets should be about changing the world.**

engagement and purpose. It is raw and human. People are more likely to read your material if they know something about you. We need to interact, not transmit. Our followers will be a mix of the influential, curious, eccentric and hostile.

---

The internet brings non-state actors into the conversation. That's part of the point. Once they're in, they can't be ignored. Diplomacy is action not reportage, so tweets should be about changing the

## We now have the means to influence the countries we work in on a massive scale.

world, not just describing how it looks. What makes my country richer? What makes my country more secure?

Of course social media can't replace diplomacy. We still need secrets, and direct conversations, however many of us become what the Economist calls 'Tweeting Talleyrands'. We have to recognise the limits. This is just one tool among many. Just like a clever telegram, the pithy tweet does not matter more than the action it describes. The message matters more than the medium.

Many of us have made mistakes on social media, but the biggest mistake is not to be on it.

This is happening all around us, with or without diplomats. It presents threats as well as opportunities. But so did the

printing press, the telephone, air travel. Now that anyone can be a diplomat, we have to show that you can't live without diplomats.

We need to seize our smartphones.

***Tom Fletcher is the British Ambassador to Lebanon and a former Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister David Cameron.***

# Disruptive Diplomacy

Lovisa Williams | Digital Diplomacy Coalition



@LovisaTalk

**D**iplomacy, and how we define diplomacy, is changing. No longer is it just an art for the elite or people with titles. It is becoming a social craft that requires mastery of social technologies and a knack for relationship building. It has begun to empower people at all levels of government to engage more directly with the public. This empowerment is not only changing the conversations we are having with the public, but also providing us with more opportunities for public/private partnerships, informal collaboration with the public, and the ability to reach more people in places that previously were not accessible.

## How do we prepare to become more social?

Most governments aren't prepared for the changes that technology and the world are thrusting upon them. Most consider these changes disruptive and uncomfortable. Many prefer to ignore their existence or think they can smother them if they sense they are encroaching

on their borders. Change is difficult for everyone. Change forces all of us to look in the mirror and contemplate who we are, what is our value, and how we may need to change for success in this new world. This is not an easy journey for us individually, let alone for governments.

But we have no choice. We are being forced to adapt.

One of the greatest challenges we all face as we evolve into more social organisations, is how do we prepare to become more social? Social and government haven't usually co-existed well in a formal sense nor are they normally considered to be easy partners. But since there is no choice, how do we manage these changes? How do we ensure success? In an age where all of us are increasingly budget conscious, how do we scale activities and training for employees in a way that is cost-effective and valuable?

We may intellectually understand the changes these social technologies herald.

We may be able to master the tools to make us successful. But real success comes from embracing the ideas of how to be social. How do we have an official conversation? How do we provide opportunities for collaboration? How do we build trust with the public? How can we be more transparent in our dealings with the public?

It will require our employees to embrace new ways of thinking. This culture change comes from strong leadership, realistic policies, flexible processes, creation of an innovative environment, and extensive training. While formal approaches to cultural change are important, it is even more important to recognise the employees on the front lines of our organisations.

They are the practitioners of social technologies. Chances are they had been experimenting with these technologies long before you thought about writing a social media use policy. These are our pioneers and future leaders. It is

## It is no longer a choice. We must do so.

important that we support and incubate these employees. It is no longer a choice about whether we should to make these investments in our people. We must do so. They are the lifeblood and our future.

In 2012, a small grassroots meetup group called the Digital Diplomacy Coalition (DDC) started in Washington, DC. The

premise was to explore and share how we are using social technologies for our various diplomatic missions. It is free for people to participate and most events occur after hours. What started as a meetup group has grown to be a fully-fledged community of over 700 members. We meet to share best practices and talk about issues unique to governments who share the diplomacy mission.

With the celebration of our one year anniversary, the DDC has started to expand to other world capitals. We will be developing DDC chapters where there are people who are willing to commit to helping each other learn and be more effective with social technologies. For us, this is an exciting development. It

---

provides the opportunity for more people and governments to get involved and start collaborating more with each other

## This participation begins to build new relationships between governments.

on social technologies. It raises the level of social expertise for all participating governments. This participation does not just provide governments with the ability to be more successful in providing information, services, and opportunities for collaboration with the public, but it begins to build new relationships and communications channels between

governments. It is the creation of a truly global diplomacy community.

There are significant opportunities available to all governments who can embrace social technologies. But that success will be directly related to having the right people in place who understand

the technologies, knowing how to build relationships with people, and understanding the diplomacy mission. The DDC is just one option for how a government might start to build social capacity. We are truly on the cusp of changing how governments work, how they engage with their citizens, and the impact they can have globally.

***Lovisa Williams serves on the Leadership Team of the Digital Diplomacy Coalition in Washington, DC.***

# Digital Diplomacy - facing a future without borders

Jimmy Leach | Senior Digital Associate, Portland



@JimmyTLeach

**S**o far, the evolution of digital diplomacy has been a happy one. Foreign Ministries are doing digital. Everyone is jolly pleased - isn't everyone clever as they engage in diplomatic persiflage on Twitter, Facebook and Weibo? Nation shall tweet, retweet and like unto nation.

It's been a pretty smooth digitisation. The arguments about whether diplomats should take to digital channels swiftly became not about 'whether' but about 'how quickly'. As diplomats piled on, the first wonder was akin to that of the dancing bear - not that they did it especially well, but that they did it at all. Foreign Ministries are often not the most risk-addicted of organisations, so to see them tread warily into third party

platforms was, for a time, enough in itself. They talked to their own citizens, other countries, on other platforms. Soon enough, it became two-way; it became a genuine conversation. Debating Yemen on Facebook, Syria on Facebook, then Egypt on Twitter - quite the thing. Occasionally

**Foreign ministries are entering a world more different than many realise.**

things got a little over-giddy, hopping on to platforms for the sake of hopping on to platforms (the diplomatic potential

of Mixcloud?), but there were points for trying.

Yet simply by engaging in social media spaces, foreign ministries are entering a world more different than many realise, and changing, possibly even unwittingly, how public diplomacy will work.

In the pre-digital world, diplomats had worked in rarefied places - high-ceilinged, chandeliered rooms to meetings to which only other diplomats were invited: what the US State Department's Alec Ross used to define as "men in black suits, white shirts and red ties talking to other men in black suits, white shirts and red ties." The rest of us weren't invited.

But digital and social media isn't the preserve of the diplomatic classes. The rules of engagement of diplomacy - its arcane language, its shared expectations of glacial movements in policy implementation - are not shared by a Twitterati for whom news travels round the world in seven seconds flat.

So instead of the rest of us peering through the windows at diplomats' summits, it was they who were coming to us - ties loosening, brogues creaking - at our party. And, like anyone at a party, they suddenly found themselves talking awkwardly to people who weren't really their type.

The big shift that digital diplomacy gives us is not that governments are

discussing policy on new platforms, it's that they are discussing with new people. At the same time, those digital platforms have given birth to new networks, new groupings of people that were determined by something other than the traditional sense of nationhood. Some might be yolked together by region, rather than nation, or by religion, by economics, by gender, or by ideas. In the digital sphere, these groupings are every bit as legitimate, and often more vocal, than groupings decided by borders and flags.

Many can still dismiss these groups as 'interest groups'. Or fanatics. Or extremists. Pick your dismissive group noun of choice. But this is the real, and growing, challenge of

digital diplomacy. A diplomat's clients are changing. Post-digital, post-9/11, post-Arab Spring, a diplomat is looking at groups which are based around a whole new set of values and loyalties that are not related to those borders drawn hundreds of years ago. Indeed, some members of those interest groups/fanatics/extremists are in your own country. In Woolwich for

**This is the real, and growing, challenge of digital diplomacy.**

example. Those with whom the diplomat must engage have shape-shifted and hard



---

diplomacy is difficult with people who don't share the same view of the rule of law: soft power is harder when faced with Al Qaeda members in Arsenal shirts, and digital diplomacy is harder when groupings are fluidly forming in public and hidden areas of the web.

But a diplomat has to engage with these groups - because they are possible challenges to the nation that he/she represents. There are a few challenges - you have to find them first. And you have to engage with them when they have no duty to engage with you. A diplomat's job description, effectively, includes 'speak to other diplomats, foreign ones included' in amongst the list of core tasks. But a fluid group of people who have gathered round an abstract idea don't have any contract

or job description, they don't wear white shirts and red ties, and they may not want to respond or converse in the way you want to. Where's the treaty, the protocols, the agreements, the furniture of diplomacy?

While we are in a period of change, it's only just beginning; the notion of nation still remains hugely strong. A diplomat can legitimately call on that concept as their main job. But it's altering and the speed of change is increasing. A diplomat is facing a different set of challenges and dealing with them will require a different skill-set. Some will have it, some do have it - but many do not. Digital diplomacy will no longer be about a certain élan on Twitter, it will be about identifying non-state actors and the channels of their

choice, with which to monitor and engage with them to form new relationships. For the UK, its biggest foreign policy challenges do not just lie with rogue states, but with rogue ideas (and the links between the two). Dealing with that is a lot more complicated than it used to be, sitting around the table with Bismarck. And it's going to get a whole lot harder.

***Jimmy Leach is Senior Digital Associate at Portland and former Head of Digital Diplomacy at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.***



**90** staff

**70** country experience

**50** current clients

**40** years on Fleet Street

**35** years in Downing Street

**20** of the world's top listed companies



[www.portland-communications.com](http://www.portland-communications.com)



@PortlandComms

# Portland



## **London**

1 Red Lion Court

London

EC4A 3EB

t: +44 (0) 20 7842 0123

f: +44 (0) 20 7842 0145

## **New York**

The Chrysler Building

405 Lexington Ave

26th Floor

New York, NY 10174

t: +1 212 541 2481

## **Nairobi**

4th Floor Laiboni Centre

Lenana Road

Nairobi, Kenya

t: +254 (0) 20 493 8200