

MEDIA RELATIONS

in the Social Networking Age





“We used to only interact with journalists at traditional publications. Now, there are citizen journalists that our customers communicate with every day.”

—Erica Coleman, Senior Public Relations
Manager, McAfee Security

Media Relations

in the Social Networking Age

Working With Media in a Digital World: 4 Principles for Success

By Carolyn Kim

In a world where major news stories break first online and journalists' statements on social networks define careers, it's vital for any media relations strategy to include a strong social media component. Quite simply, social media and media relations are intricately woven together. Understand this principle, and your online media relations will go further.

As a PR professional, there are four basic principles to remember to succeed with online media relations.

1. Build a Robust Community

With so much content created online, organizations and brands that have strong social communities are more attractive to journalists. In the online world, having more fans, more followers, and more connections equates to more digital status.

The digital world is a huge consideration for media outlets. In fact, the Pew Research Center's 2011 Annual Report on American Journalism revealed that every news platform except the Web had their audience decline or stall in 2010. Journalists know that reaching the online community is vital for the future of news media. Just as larger organizations will have more people interested in the print news about the company, an organization with a large social community will have more interest in the online sphere. It's all about the audience.

Take this example: if **Apple** has something printed about it in the online sphere, the thou-

sands of people interested in following Apple news online will be reading that media piece. On the other hand, if a small business with little online following has a piece printed about it, the media outlet wouldn't have the same level of traffic to the article. That's why developing your online following helps with pitching to the media.

As PR professionals, we all know that when we pitch a story it needs to be a win-win. In the digital world, having a large community that cares about your organization provides a stronger win for the journalist, because it will equate to more readers, more online activity for the publication, and an all around larger impact for the coverage.

Online value is about breadth and depth. If you want to build a relationship with a journalist, help them build their social footprint.

2. Establish an Organizational Social Footprint

While this may sound similar to the first point, it is actually very different. Having thousands of followers (or hundreds of thousands) is good. But, if your social footprint is nonexistent, the audience that you have in your social media world is actually a disengaged audience.

Damage Control: Stopping Negative Coverage

We've all seen it happen...someone gets upset, and goes online to share it—and the story becomes a national headline. No one is immune from a social media story gone awry.

Part of good online media relations is not only cultivating relations with journalists, but also watching for negative stories that may hit the media. As PR professionals, there's a huge opportunity to bridge the gap with upset customers, before it goes viral. Here are a few tips:

1. **Monitor your keywords on social sites for anything**—you can even monitor tones, to an extent. Services like search.twitter.com, **Google Alerts** and **Kurrently.com** are ways to monitor your keywords. If you're willing to pay for social media monitoring tools, you have the option of seeing "tone" within comments. Posts will be categorized as "positive," "neutral" or "negative." But

take note: the results can be thrown off by sarcasm and humor, since a computer algorithm wouldn't account for that.

2. **When someone blasts your brand online, check their influence.** Will that be retweeted, blogged, posted and more? If so, go to the source.
3. **Contact the user offline.** You can do this through a **Direct Message**, a **Facebook Message** or sometimes an e-mail address is listed (or even a cell number). This is your chance to do damage control and make it right.

If you succeed, you'll stop the story before it starts, and you may even get better coverage of the organization's response. The key is being there at the start of the social conversation—before the story is picked up.

—Carolyn Kim

You must be interactive, and make an impact in your social efforts—that's when you'll reap the rewards from online initiatives.

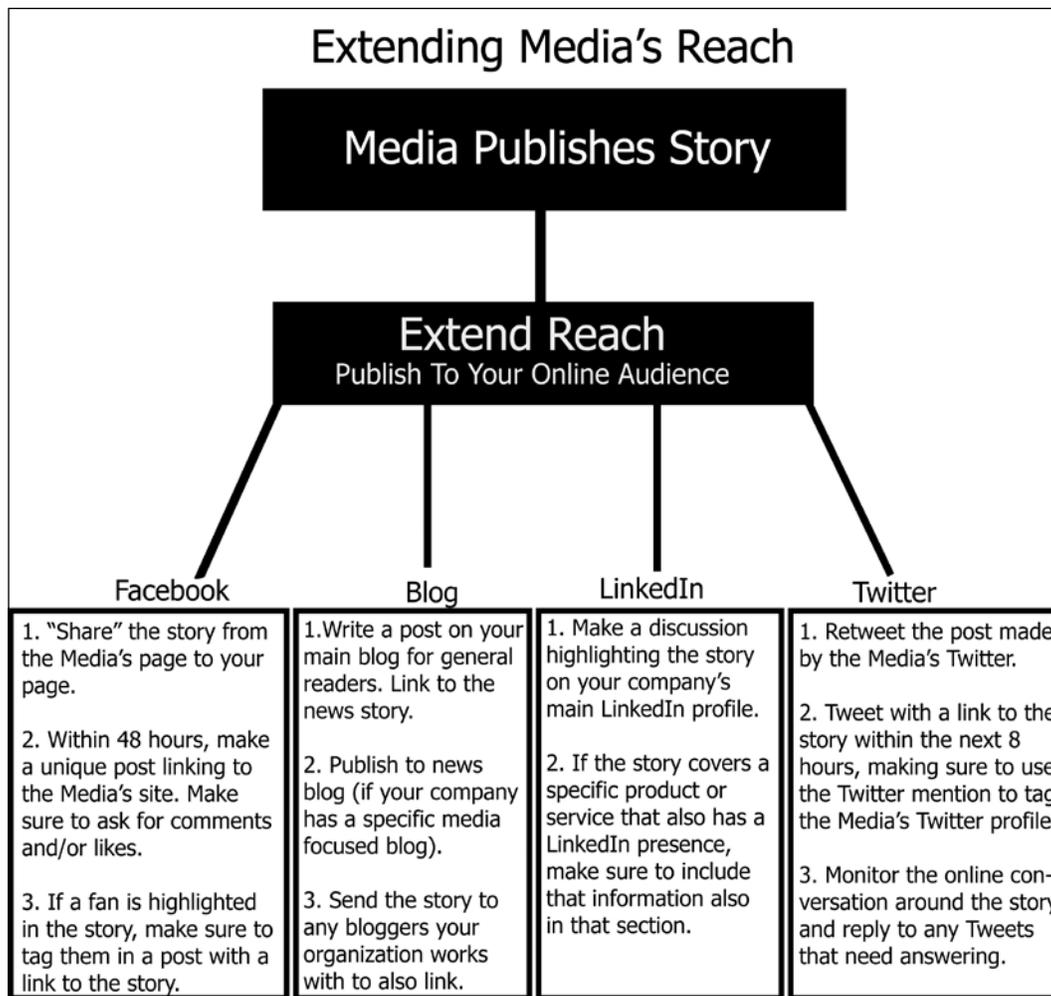
It's really about social media 101—engage your audience and provide a platform for on-line conversation. If you're posting on Facebook, you want likes, comments and shares. If you're tweeting, you want retweets and mentions. For LinkedIn, you want discussions. The list goes on and on. Having active followers makes your presence online significantly more valuable.

The worth of interaction comes down to this: With the development of algorithms to determine the relevance of content within social networks, companies that do not generate interaction will not have their content seen. It's as simple as that. Those that do engage will rise

to the top social media circles.

Not sure what this all means? Here's some real-world facts to illustrate. Most of your Facebook likes will not be back to your page after the join (some experts estimate as many as 90% never come back); they'll only see your posts in the News status if your EdgeRank (the algorithm used by Facebook to evaluate the value of a post) is high enough. For your EdgeRank to be high, you have to have a strong social connection with your users, evaluated by how often a user interacts with your content, as well as several other factors. If you're not sure how your EdgeRank is doing, you can always check it at sites like EdgeRankChecker.com.

Likewise, your Twitter followers won't be coming to your profile searching for what you've said—they'll be looking at their own



Strategies for getting the word out: Encourage and implement digital discussions via Facebook, your blog, LinkedIn and Twitter to extend the reach of your media coverage.

Twitter stream. If your content isn't there, your Twitter efforts are failing. But if you're consistent and interesting, users will begin tweeting, mentioning and spreading your content.

At the end of the day, followers are good. Active followers are great. But raving followers are ideal; they give you the social footprint that journalists will want to have behind their work.

3. Enhance the Media's Depth and Value

We all have different tactics we use to cultivate relationships with journalists who cover our industry. In today's world, part of that cultivation needs to be in the social world.

Remember: Online value is about breadth and depth. If you want to build a relationship with a journalist, help them build their social footprint. If they have published a story, make sure you highlight it on your social outlets. If you see they've covered an interesting topic (yes, even if it's not about your company), share it. By doing this, you'll not only be building your social community, but you'll be extending the depth of the journalist's value.

If the media knows that when they cover you, your fans, followers and connections all begin talking about the story, too, the attractiveness of picking up that press release you provided becomes much greater. If a decision is between two different stories, and they know that when your company is covered the social buzz is ex-

ponentially greater for the media outlet, you'll be a step ahead.

A cornerstone for media relations is to make things easy for the journalist and media outlet; when you help get readers, viewers and users to the outlet source, that's exactly what you're doing.

4. Cultivate Quality Content

There are two sides to this coin. You have to cultivate quality content by sifting through the numerous online stories people are sharing about your organization and then drawing out the most captivating content. And you also have to cultivate quality content by using digital knowledge to make strong pitches to the media. It's about story telling and story pitching.

Storytelling

The Internet has been called the "great equalizer." Everyone can become published, everyone has a voice...and everyone creates content. But the truth is, not all content is quality content. In media relations, knowing how to cultivate quality content online is a skill that PR professionals must have.

Social networks provide a fantastic opportunity to find people that can help tell your organization's story. These are real people talking about their experiences with your brand, company or organization. There are stories to be found, and told. But you must measure quality. And when you're looking for online quality, measuring the value of the story isn't the only factor. It's also about the individual.

Before responding to an amazing story from a social contact, do your research. Just like an organization looks into the social profiles of future employees, PR professionals need to look at the social profiles of future media focuses.

Things you'll want to check:

Tools to Make It Happen

If you're new to social media, there are plenty of tools out there to measure your reach—both paid and free services. For a quick snapshot, check out one of these sites:

- [Klout.com](#)
- [PeerIndex.net](#)
- [TweetReach.com](#)
- [SocialMention.com](#)

Of course, any good analysis of online activity includes looking at analytics. If you posted a link, it should be driving traffic. If you released a story online, you should be seeing the content disseminating throughout the social media world. If you're not, it may be that you don't have much social media status.

Check sites like [search.twitter.com](#) for your username, product, spokesperson, etc., to see where they are being used and talked about.

Set up Google Alerts to know when something starts going viral.

Facebook Insights lets you see your users and activities, and it will indicate whether they're engaged. And, while free is always nice, you may want to find a service that offers deeper analysis of your social footprint. This will allow you to:

- Monitor the tone (to some extent) when your company is discussed, as well as the frequency.
- Start engaging with specific users, based on what they published, and begin to ascertain the influences are among your followers—and then target them more.
- Learn how much reach a person has—if they retweet your content (or post, or share), you'll be able to see how many more people it's reaching.

—Carolyn Kim

- Are their photos appropriate?
- Is the language they use reflective of your company's values?
- Is the type of content they post in other places (your competitors, other brands, etc.) consistent with the way they represented themselves to you?

Basically, make sure this person provides not only a great story about your organization, but also is a great spokesperson. That's what it will come down to. If the media runs with the story, there's the potential they will be the face of your organization for a little while—so do your research. It's very similar to what a PR professional would do outside of the social world, but this step is easily overlooked if professionals only consider the content the user shares on the company's social presence.

This all reflects the new ways of journalism. Some media outlets find that sources respond faster when contacted via Facebook or Twitter as opposed to phone calls. As using social networks becomes more and more common to gain information for stories, PR professionals will need to be active in connecting with those who can help tell the story well.

Story Pitching

An additional method of cultivating quality content online is to familiarize yourself with the journalists' latest work, and how your story fits into it. Look at what they're talking about in the social world. When you know what they are focusing on, you can provide the quality content they're looking for. It's a matter of taking the time to do the research.

To cultivate quality content for journalists, make sure you're friending, following, connecting (and any other social term you'd like

to insert) with the media. You need to keep a finger on their social pulse, so when the time comes to pitch, you already know how to get the quality content they like to cover.

Most likely, you already have a system that pulls journalists' latest stories, the people they're known to interview, the timetables, and perhaps their deadline schedules. But take it a step further: Make sure you're tracking digital elements. Ask yourself:

- Where are their stories normally posted?
- Can I provide them with more audience?
- Do they generally see a great deal of social activity?

Knowing their social habits and mannerisms for news publishing allows you to leverage your social influence. For example, when you pitch an exclusive, you may mention that you'd like to share the article with your 100,000 likes on Facebook or 25,000 followers on Twitter. You may make a point of driving some traffic to their media outlet site (generating users and, hopefully, comments in the feedback section).

The changing landscape of PR has forever shifted how we do things, and media relations is just one more illustration of that point. The basic principles of media relations have not changed, but we've got to continue building our strategy to include the digital world, knowing that social influence makes or breaks the conversations our audiences are participating in. The success of media relations hinges on it. **PRN**

Carolyn Kim is a digital communications specialist at Ambassador Advertising Agency in Orange County, CA. She also is an adjunct professor of public relations at Biola University in La Mirada, CA.

Online War Room: Training a Public Figure in Social Media Relations

By Christian Hunter

The media has focused its broad lens on celebrities, politicians and CEOs, and as an unfortunate result, headlines and stories have been taken out of context and extracted into irrelevant sound bites. Since the majority of day-to-day public relations practitioners work with these public figures, a surge in new media training is needed to provide sound advice and counsel on how to appropriately and effectively respond and deal with the media.

With the unparalleled increase of avenues and outlets for voicing opinions, how are PR pros positioned to train their public, celebrity clients in nontraditional media, such as social media? What is the protocol for responding to online comments? Should the response be visible to everyone, or rather a direct message to the online critic? And when is it appropriate for public figures to post a message on social media?

This article outlines the when, what and how of creating, positioning and responding to statements on blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, among other social networks.

What's the Harm?

We've seen it a million times, and every few weeks, another case study arises. An organization practiced bad social media etiquette, an executive made the headlines with an offbeat online comment, or a celebrity gets in hot water because of an online rant. Do you recall any of the following examples?

- Nestlé made insensitive remarks on its

Facebook page, urging fans not to use their company logo as a profile picture unless they wanted to get slapped with a potential intellectual property lawsuit. Their offensive demeanor and sarcastic tone was ill-received by fans. Suddenly, they were in the midst of an online crisis dealing with maintaining the integrity of their brand.

- Many people knew the **Aflac** Duck for its commercials, but few knew that the voice behind the duck for more than a decade was celebrity comedian Gilbert Gottfried. That is, until his offending jokes on Twitter about the disastrous earthquakes in Japan got him fired as the spokesperson for the company.
- Designer **Kenneth Cole** hijacked a pop-



Illustration by Steve Meyer

Comedian Gilbert Gottfried lost his gig as the voice of the Aflac Duck after making inappropriate jokes on Twitter.

ular Twitter hashtag (#Cairo) in order to shamelessly promote his spring collection in the midst of Egypt's political revolution. The backlash Kenneth Cole received on all his social networks for this social media offense caused even more uproar. It showed the gaping holes in his brand's social media strategy on how to handle oneself when an online attack turns into a full-blown PR crisis.

All of these examples highlight the necessity to understand how to interact with all forms of new media. People are consumed by social media—they create, share and spread information as fast as they can process it—all day, every day. A 2010 study by **Cision/GSPM** found that 52% of journalists use microblogging services such as Twitter in their daily job functions, and another study reported that 37% of publications require reporters to use Twitter for research and identifying story opportunities.

It's no longer acceptable for people to claim ignorance when it comes to social media negligence. This media platform has been around long enough, so when—not if—you choose to use the platform, you need to know the essential guidelines for posting and responding to comments and criticism.

Impact of Social Media Training

The truth is that social media, in one form or another, is here to stay. The need for brands, whether personal or corporate, to connect with their fans or customers on a deeper level has evolved; dialogues of listen and response, across multiple platforms, are at the core of today's business environment. Fans and customers are striving for real-time interactions to converse and develop a tighter bond with brands, so when something doesn't go their way, they shout it out online.

Whether you're ready to handle an online

Checklist: Before You Respond to Online Comments

- Be transparent and respond as yourself, regardless of your position.
- Sincerity is key. Address the situation at hand.
- State your intent to resolve the problem.
- Provide an avenue to take the conversation offline if necessary.
- Be accountable and follow up with how the situation was resolved. This will show your readers and viewers that you mean business and will take responsibility for your actions.

—*Christian Hunter*

social media attack or not, the sharks begin circling as soon as something inappropriate occurs online. Within seconds, what might have been an off-beat comment or intended as a joke is quickly dispersed through the Twitter stream, overrun on company Facebook pages, and commented on hundreds of blogs and online discussion forums.

Intentional or not, how do you take control of the situation? First of all, this is no time for an intern to show his or her potential. Leave it to the experts—the over-caffeinated PR pros who have done this before and barely break a sweat when informed of what just occurred.

Let's take the instance of Kenneth Cole's Twitter mishap in 2011. Cole set a precedent of using his initials, KC, to inform his fans when he made posts instead of a staff member in his PR department. This worked to his advantage in this case. Because of his transparency, once the firestorm broke, KC jumped back online and sent a broadcast apologizing for his re-

Dialogues of listen and response, across multiple platforms, are at the core of today's business environment.

mark, signed with his initials. His apology was posted on all his social sites, his company Web site, and his apology statement was made to the mainstream press. He wanted everyone to know this comment was nothing more than a slip on the keyboard. For the moment, the situation was almost diffused.

But less than 24 hours later, a decal of his twitter remark was found on two of his storefronts in San Francisco. Although Kenneth Cole denied any involvement, nobody believed him. Most thought this was the next stage of his campaign for more press coverage.

Several days later, when the decals were indeed found to be a prank, people were still skeptical. Why? Because his credibility had already been damaged—and his reputation tarnished.

So what does a PR pro do when a renowned client commits an ill-conceived or unintentional social media etiquette breach, or is the victim of a malicious social media act?

Currently, there are organizations which closely monitor social media trends for the potential of insuring company policies in case of any detrimental posts. Is social media insurance really the next step in protecting a company's or individual public figure's image? The bottom line for any brand, especially for those in the spotlight, is to use common sense, mind your manners in the social environment and think twice about possible repercussions before hitting the send button. **PRN**

Christian Hunter is public relations director at Studiothink in Cleveland.

10 Ways to Leverage and Extend The Reach of Your E-Newsroom

By Steve Momorella

Most organizations have some sort of area on their Web sites dedicated to news. This may be a “Press Releases” section under the About Us area of the site. Or it may be a dedicated online newsroom that is managed by the communications department. Or it may be a site run by a PR or marketing agency that works closely with the PR department to manage news.

Unfortunately, many organizations are not leveraging this online news area as a way to increase awareness of their products and services within their industry. In 2010, our company interviewed top communications executives from **Ford Motor Company, Vail Resorts, McAfee Software, Prudential and Curves** to ask them how they are using their online newsrooms to help extend their reach and increase awareness of their organizations.

One realization that is becoming increasingly important is that the audience for communications is changing. “It used to be we only interacted with journalists at traditional publications,” notes Erica Coleman, senior public relations manager for McAfee Security. “Now there are citizen journalists that our customers are communicating with every day. Plus we’re talking directly with potential customers or investors through our online newsroom. It’s expanded the PR person’s role beyond a simple focus on media to really communicating with all audiences.”

Another area of significant importance is social media. Going beyond just providing sim-

ple sharing icons on your news releases, you can fully leverage your online newsroom to integrate directly with Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, giving you the ability to instantly publish your news to a huge audience. Amy Kemp, senior communications manager for Vail Resorts, looks for “interesting ways Vail can interact and engage with not just the media but other stakeholders. The online newsroom allows us to do that,” says Kemp. “We’re providing the traditional press release in conjunction with a related story on our blog and a quick headline on Twitter. Plus, the Twitter feed links back to our online newsroom.”

By integrating your online newsroom with a blog, a Twitter feed and your Facebook account, you can get your news directly in front of your customers.

Below are some additional tips to help you leverage your online newsroom to create more awareness and extend the reach of your news.

1. Transparency is important not only to social media, but to your online newsroom as well. Don’t “plant” nice comments to your press releases or “swag” every blogger who writes about your industry. Keep it genuine.
2. Attach a news blog to your online newsroom to provide industry insight from expert employees, monitor opinions and address rumors that relate to your company and its products.
3. You are now in the publishing business. Make sure that you post news immedi-

ately to your online newsroom so that you are the one breaking your news story instead of somebody else.

4. Engage internal stakeholders in the content development and distribution plan for your online newsroom—including legal, human resources, sales and marketing. It's important they understand and share your vision for the site.
5. Let journalists request specific types of news they want to receive from you. This not only reduces the clutter in their inboxes, but allows your e-mail alert to be recognized as news of interest to them and their beats.
6. Train everyone on your staff on the basics of online newsroom management, content publishing and crisis-site deployment. During crunch time, everyone must be a contributor.
7. Provide subscription access to newly posted releases via Really Simple Syndication (RSS). This provides a more immediate method to share content with constituents.
8. Post content links to Twitter through the online newsroom for wider distribution of your key messages. Retweets work.

“We provide the traditional press release, in conjunction with a related story on our blog and a quick headline on Twitter.”

—Amy Kemp, Senior Communications Manager, Vail Resorts

9. Think of YouTube as a video news distribution site that provides greater visibility to the digital assets you are already publishing within your online newsroom.
10. Allow comments about your content within the online newsroom. This is, after all, the most precise measurement of stakeholder engagement. Treat that feedback to your online newsroom like gold—it simply means your readers care enough to say something. **PRN**

Steve Momorella is owner, founder and marketing and sales director of TEKGROUP, an Internet software and services company.

Not Just Your Mom's Jobs Database: LinkedIn Is Powerful PR

By PR News Editors

In March 2011, the professional social network **LinkedIn** hit a key milestone in its eight-year history: 100 million users. And as of May 2011, the company has successfully gone public and unveiled a number of new products. So far so good, right?

However, there have been murmurs in the press that LinkedIn could be losing its luster. In the IPO filing, the company admitted that those 100 million registered members is higher than “actual” members. And consider that 100 million members is just a drop in the bucket over at Facebook, which had more than 600 million users in mid-2011.

Indeed, much has been said of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. But what of LinkedIn? Is this platform known for job networking the ugly social stepchild? While PR pros have tightly embraced the Big Three platforms, doesn't LinkedIn deserve more than just a little hug?

While Jesse Goldman, head of marketing and business development at workplace productivity software maker **Rypple**, believes LinkedIn is a popular outlet for driving brand awareness, “I'm not sure it's being used to its fullest as a communications tool,” he says. So just how can LinkedIn be used to its fullest PR potential? PR News aimed to find out.

Goldman is one communications pro who is sold on LinkedIn, calling it a “one-stop shop to build community, engage with it and raise awareness of the brand.”

Just how does Rypple do that? It has its own

community, Agile People Manifesto, through which it shares its webinars and interviews with thought leaders in the industry. In addition, Goldman and other Rypple employees participate in related LinkedIn groups—not unlike what goes on at Facebook. But Goldman says there is one big LinkedIn feature that differentiates the two: recommendations.

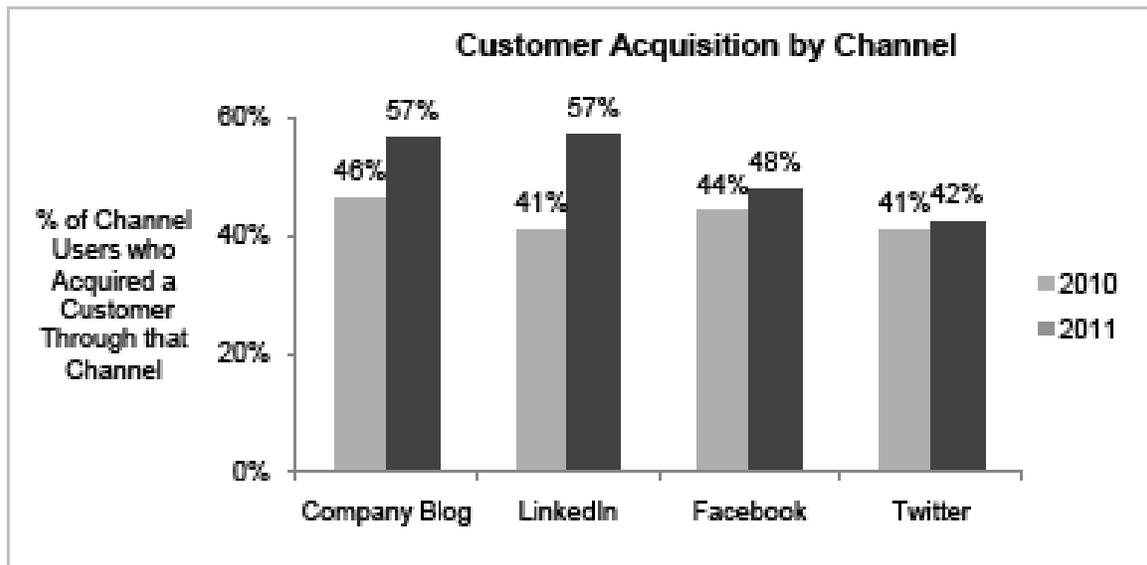
LinkedIn is a viable alternative to subscribing to media relations services.

On Rypple's company page, people can write endorsements of the company. Goldman believes the barrier of entry for LinkedIn is greater than Facebook's, and therefore the quality of recommendations is greater. Then, of course, those recommendations get shared on other peoples' networks.

Krista Canfield, senior manager of corporate communications at LinkedIn, agrees that recommendations is a powerful viral component of the platform. She says it's even more effective when a company sets up a “Products and Services” tab at the top of its page, and encourages clients to recommend specific offerings that are listed on that page. Canfield says to check out **HP's** company page as an example.

The ability to make LinkedIn followers aware of products and services is also a differentiator

LinkedIn Proves Powerful in Acquiring Customers



Think LinkedIn is just an online employment destination? Think again. A March 2011 Hubspot survey of nearly 700 business professionals (76% of them from b2b companies) shows the platform to be more powerful than Facebook and Twitter in garnering customers, and is right up there in effectiveness with the company blog.

Source: HubSpot

from other social platforms. Sharing that information at first made Goldman a bit uncomfortable. “I didn’t want to be too sales-y,” he says. “But people don’t seem to mind.” In fact, LinkedIn is a more powerful direct customer acquisition tool than Facebook and Twitter (see chart).

LinkedIn to Media

There is a plethora of other uses of LinkedIn for PR, including media relations. In fact, Canfield teaches a course for journalists in the use of LinkedIn. Clearly, if it’s an effective tool for journalists, it should be for their PR counterparts.

With its roots as a database, LinkedIn is a viable alternative to subscribing to media relations services. According to Bill Corbett, president of **Corbett PR**, it’s surprising how easy it is to research and interact with reporters on LinkedIn. “There used to be that wall where it

was hard to get to know them,” says Corbett. Now, many journalists are on LinkedIn, and their profiles are filled with useful information on their interests, “so you know what to pitch and what not to pitch,” says Corbett.

Speaking of pitching, Corbett has found that LinkedIn’s “InMail” tends to be just as or even more effective in reaching connected journalists than regular e-mail. When pitching to a reporter in his network, Corbett sends it via both platforms. In addition, LinkedIn status updates make it easier to track reporters as they move from one gig to another—this is important considering today’s fractured media landscape.

David Hattery, senior account executive at PR agency **SunStar Strategic**, has another media-related tip: If you’re on a reporter’s LinkedIn page, scroll down to the bottom right and check out the “Viewers of this Profile Also Viewed” box. “I’ve found many new reporters

that way,” says Hattery.

Canfield cautions to tread carefully with journalists on LinkedIn. “When you make a connection request, remind the journalist how you know them,” says Canfield. And don’t pitch a journalist on LinkedIn without reading their profile first.

Competitive Edge

Connecting with reporters isn’t the only LinkedIn activity that provides distinct PR advantages. Canfield says to connect with companies you want as clients or customers. And if you’re a PR agency, follow other agencies.

Just remember, says Canfield, to sync up your LinkedIn page with your Twitter account, so that popular platform will trumpet new product announcements, special offers, interesting

articles, etc.

Corbett offers other suggestions to make LinkedIn work for your PR programs:

- Make sure there’s a connection to your blog. “People can read your profile, but a blog is really where they get to know you,” says Corbett.
- For better SEO, ensure that your organization’s profile is filled out to 100%, and that you’ve included keywords in the profile.
- If you’re putting on a live event, consider forming a LinkedIn group that addresses the event topic.

Bottom line: Don’t ignore LinkedIn as a PR tool. It’s awareness building, customer acquisition and media relations strengths shouldn’t be underestimated. **PRN**

How to Reinvent and Recharge Press Releases with SEO Tactics

By Vanessa Bugasch

A New Wave band, the Buggles, once had a hit song called “Video Killed the Radio Star.” It was about how cruel new technologies and modes of communication can be to institutions that refuse to change.

Listening to the rumblings in the PR business lately, you’d think they were singing a tune called “Social Media Killed the Press Release.”

But nothing could be more wrong. The truth is, social media has helped to transform the press release—giving it new life, a vastly larger audience and a huge role in generating traffic to your organization’s Web site.

This “new wave” press release has evolved into a more compelling and interactive medium. It’s concise, and easy to retweet and share. It encourages dialogue and interaction.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is important to the success of today’s press release. Optimized press releases attract consumers and influencers, as well as journalists—and pulls them into your story.

To get the biggest bang out of SEO, you may need to change the way you write your release. Some basic, traditional best practices still apply, but here are 10 tips to keep in mind to optimize your releases:

1. **Choose the Right Keywords.** Search engines think like your audience. Know the keywords or phrases that will drive them to the news release, and motivate them to click through to pages on your Web site, before you write. Do basic keyword

research on sites like Google AdWords, Wordtracker or Keyword Discovery.

2. **Speak Your Audience’s Language.** Avoid buzzwords and jargon. Your audience may use different terms to describe your product or industry. For example, if you’re promoting a new athletic shoe, are people searching on sneaker or gym shoe or tennis shoe? Use keyword research to make sure you are talking their language.
3. **Be Specific. Be Selective.** A press release containing nothing but keywords will confuse search engines and turn off readers. Use only three to five keywords in a 400-word release. Try to find keywords that are favored by consumers but are unique to your message—and are thus less used by competitors. Don’t overuse them, and write clearly.
4. **Use Your Heads.** Use one to two keywords in the headline and subhead. Search engine spiders read left to right; take that into account as you compose your headlines and your first paragraph. Use no more than 200 characters in the summary or subhead.
5. **Optimize From the Top Down.** Spiders also read from the top down. Using keywords in the first two paragraphs makes a much bigger impact than using them lower down. As you write, think in sound bites, like 140-character tweets.
6. **Have Anchor Text, Will Travel.** What

is your ideal outcome after someone reads your release? Likely it's to get your news out, increase traffic to your home and/or product pages and get a better view of prospects and customers. Anchor text links can take your audiences where they—and you—want to go. They are made up of hyperlinked words (often keywords) that are underscored or in colored type.

Optimized press releases attract consumers and influencers, as well as journalists—and pulls them into your story.

By clicking on it, readers can drill down for more information about the keyword/topic they searched on, and register for a future sales opportunity.

7. **Don't Over-Link.** As with keywords, don't overdo anchor text: It causes confusion and dilutes the impact of the links themselves. Offer two to three links for a 400-word press release.
8. **You Can't Go Home Again ... and Again.** Don't just link to your homepage.

Keep readers engaged by driving them to other pages that relate directly to the content of the linked text.

9. **Multimedia Rules.** Research shows that press releases with pictures, video and other multimedia get at least 80% more search traffic than text-only releases. They're usually more appealing and interesting, too. You'd be surprised how easy it is to create your own video or add visuals that support your product, message or campaign.
10. **Post Your Release on an Optimized Press Release Web site.** SEO Web sites boost results because they have higher page rankings than most corporate Web sites; most are cost-effective and easy to use. Some enable you to create online newsrooms with video/multimedia, white papers, FAQs and other ancillary materials.

The press release has never been more alive. But it is changing—and must continue to evolve. Tips like these can help you take advantage of the press release's exciting present and future. **PRN**

Vanessa Bugasch is senior VP of global marketing at Cision, a provider of PR software, services and tools.

Hub and Spoke Model: Corporate Messaging and Media Outreach

By Sue Otten

AGCO, a global manufacturer of agricultural equipment where I serve as director of corporate marketing and brand communications, was determined to enhance its corporate brand messaging through social media efforts.

AGCO's goal was twofold: build the awareness of its corporate brand and positively position its product brands for growth and margin improvement. But with limited budgets, in terms of both funding and manpower, PR and communications efforts to build the brand needed to share technologies and content development processes.

In addition, though the corporate marketing team was well suited to write and produce branded messages, it did not have all the information that was needed to produce content. Instead, it was far more effective for them to be the curators of content, acting as editors and publishers, than to be the creators of content. The product brand teams, which are decentralized and with a matrix-managed organizational structure, required the right tools and process to pull the stories together. That became possible with the hub and spoke model.

The Hub and Spoke Model

In the case of social media messaging, the model applies the simple organizational pattern of the hub and spoke. Its goal is to maximize exposure of corporate messaging and content as it originates from a single, centralized point. In AGCO's case, the hub was established through its global blog, with con-

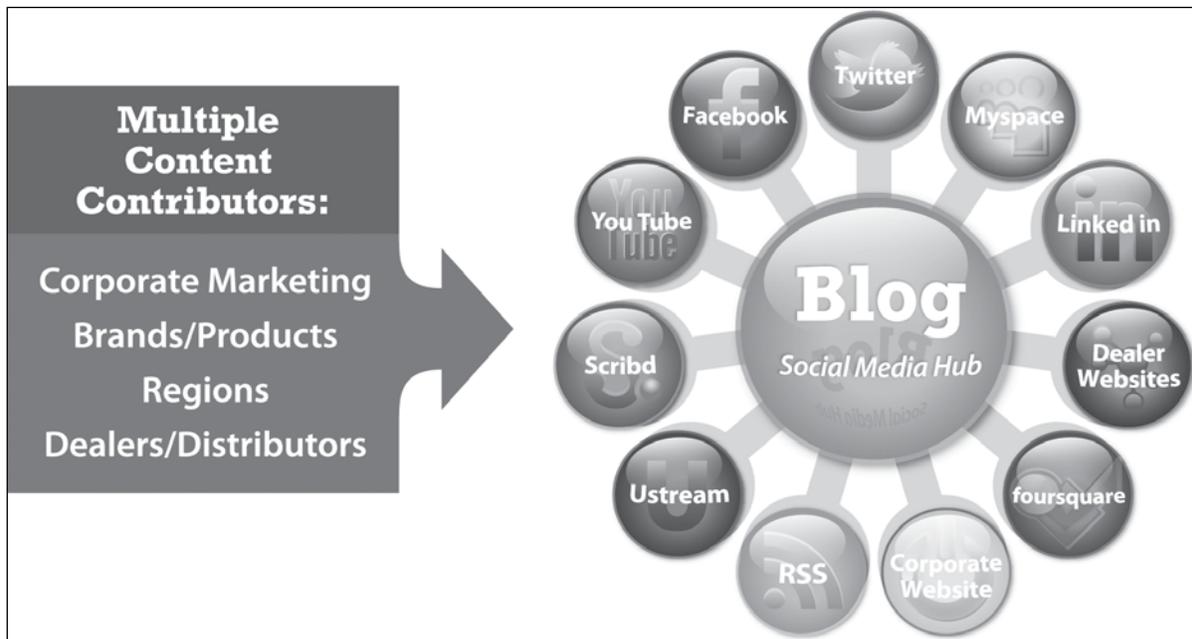
tent flowing through several connective messaging channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and RSS feeds) as the spokes.

This social media model is particularly useful when trying to stretch the reach of a small corporate marketing team, which must expose the corporate brand message across languages, countries and continents. While many traditional communication channels are helpful in achieving these objectives, social media, in particular, has emerged (and continues to evolve) as an extremely low-cost, high-impact tool, capable of spanning the globe.

Mile Wide, Inch Deep

As with many corporate marketing teams, the phrase "mile wide, inch deep" often is used to describe the overarching exposure objectives of the AGCO team. The goal, as we headed into 2010, was to deliver the corporate brand message to as large an audience as possible, including a wide variety of stakeholders. In the case of AGCO, this audience includes both business and consumer groups: dealers, customers, prospects, consumers, farmers, members of the agriculture industry at large, as well as internal employees. AGCO's objective is to build AGCO brands and share information about its products and services.

Under this rubric of "mile wide, inch deep," the hub and spoke model provides a corporate mouthpiece for brands, products, services and regional marketing teams around the globe. It supports both broad corporate brand building



AGCO used the hub and spoke model to maximize the exposure of its corporate messaging through one central social media hub.

and specific product brand messaging.

Distributing content from the blog through the social channels, or spokes, allows AGCO's small team to disseminate information about hundreds of products, including technical information, news about new products, product care and maintenance how-tos. In addition, marketing teams can share and receive customer testimonials. The parent organization uses this same infrastructure to leverage its global agriculture expertise, contribute to the industry's community in social media, connect with journalists and citizen journalists, promote AGCO's corporate mission and values and build the corporate brand.

Content Creation and Dissemination

With this model, a modest corporate marketing team has globally accessible tools and technologies at its fingertips, which can be used by marketing and sales teams across all products, brands and regions. Each global team has controlled access to the various platforms, so content can reach the market with maximum expediency and efficiency.

For global, decentralized, multi-brand orga-

nizations, getting the various internal stakeholders and marketers to participate, all of whom wish to get their messages out through corporate channels, can be a challenge. (See

Strategies for Developing Relationships With Media

- **Specialize.** Focus on the content that is relevant to the individual bloggers and journalists targeted. For example, the AGCO Blog features a separate Safety section. This feed focuses on only the blog posts that are related to farm and machine safety, so bloggers and journalists interested in this area can receive uncluttered content on the topic. This makes it easier for them to pick up our message and distribute to their own readers.
- **Custom Feeds.** Consider creating custom feeds by relevant topics that will make your content more useful to bloggers and journalists.

—Sue Otten

The hub was established through AGCO's global blog, with content flowing through several connective messaging channels serving as the spokes.

sidebar for more details on the tools AGCO uses to facilitate this process.)

Corporate Blog as the Hub

In AGCO's case, the corporate blog serves as the hub, within which there are multiple blog sections: one for broad, corporate messaging; one for each of the four core product brands; and feeds that support two of the company's core values: a strategic harvesting products initiative and farm safety. So, one blog hub houses seven individual feeds, with some overlap to ensure the corporate message is pushed out through all. The spokes are the specific social channels AGCO maintains: a Facebook business page, Twitter account, YouTube channels, **Scribd** for document sharing and **Ustream** for collaborative video chats. Remember to utilize the social tools your organization can support; for example, don't set up a YouTube or Facebook channel unless your team can commit to keeping the content current.

Establish a Central Social Editorial Calendar

Once participation is enabled and your various internal stakeholders are on board to utilize the hub and spokes, the establishment of a central social editorial content calendar will collect the content coming in from all directions, facilitate the day-to-day content efforts, and help identify areas of overlap, opportunities for further collaboration and holes in your content plan.

Checklist: Calculating ROI

Gauging social media marketing effectiveness through ROI analysis means incorporating all of the various payoffs yielded. You'll want to look at:

- Page views** (Facebook tab views, blog page views—anything you can measure)
- Time spent** (i.e., by individuals on your blog, as in the AGCO example)
- Fan/follower interactions** (likes, new follows, check-ins, comments)
- Leads generated** (e-mails, newsletter sign-ups, phone calls made, whatever constitutes a lead for your company)
- Sentiment** (Are your social Web mentions positive, negative, mostly neutral?)
- Ecosystem size** (not just your fans and followers, but their fans and followers—see this as potential reach)

Incorporate your social media investment (time and hard costs) against the above gains, and you'll have an ROI that should tell you approximately what you're getting for your dollars. This can translate into greater brand awareness, brand affinity, loyalty and higher purchase intent.

—Sue Otten

The Hub and Spoke Model For Media Outreach

The model works well for communicating a corporate message through social media channels to professional journalists, bloggers and industry voices.

Use Twitter Conferences. Post messages to the blog and support them on Twitter, where your news and stories will get picked up by

journalists and other professional and non-professional voices. (Twitter is a favorite social medium among journalists due to its headline-oriented format and ease of use in the field.)

As is the case in many industries, Twitter voices in the agriculture industry range from students and universities, to research organizations and scientists, to lobbyists, “advocates” and even farmers, big and small. This variety and the number of voices means that it is important for AGCO’s social media messaging strategy to provide a strong presence in this channel.

One example in the ag industry is AgChats, a weekly ag industry Twitter conference in which the sponsoring organization, **AgChat Foundation**, posts questions on a specific industry topic. Twitter participants tweet answers, thoughts and perspectives, which stimulate robust dialogue in the community. Twitter conferences like AgChats provide an excellent opportunity for AGCO to share its messaging and engage with relevant members of the industry.

Use Video Chats. Another way to reach out to the media with this model is through video chats. AGCO hosts its own, streaming video chat on Ustream. The process entails inviting participation first through the blog hub, then pushing that message out through to Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

The result of disseminating the invitation in this way is the development of a healthy base of participants for the Ustream video chat. They typically include members of the media in addition to customers, dealers and other industry organizations.

Direct Outreach to Bloggers/Journalists. In addition to the broad outreach tactics like Twitter conferences and streaming video chats, an important part of the model’s social media strategy is direct outreach to key bloggers and journalists. Often they are first attracted to the

Tools for Success

There are two imperatives for achieving a successful hub and spoke social media messaging model:

1. A spirit of collaboration and willingness to reach out to the various internal constituents the model is meant to serve, and;
2. The blog hub must be built in a platform that is easy to administer, allows for unlimited users at different permission levels, and is flexible enough to evolve in scope as your company evolves.

WordPress is an excellent choice for advanced enterprise blogging and hub-site hosting as described here, and is the platform AGCO selected to do the job. This platform allows the global teams responsible for creating content to quickly submit blog posts for review. The corporate marketing team approves and publishes, ensuring quality control while still enabling the global teams to contribute their content seamlessly.

You’ll also want to select automation and aggregation tools that will allow streamlining of Facebook and Twitter content. **Vitruve, CoTweet, Tweetdeck, Media Funnel** and others can help you save time and maximize your organizational output.

—Sue Otten

AGCO message through the blog and/or social channels.

Those relationships can be nurtured further through direct contact and providing relevant news and information based on individual preferences and topics. Establishing topic-related RSS feeds through a well-built blog will further enhance this relationship.

ROI – Return On Involvement For Social Media

As with any new tool, questions of ROI abound. However, things like radio—or even the Internet—were questioned as serious business communications tools when they were new. Though social media has emerged as an easy-to-use, cost-effective communication tool, marketers must be fiscally responsible corporate citizens and keep an eye on the return on their organization's time and infrastructure investments. The ROI model for each organization will be different, and they should be. Each must accurately reflect the efforts put forth and the value placed on returns gained.

For AGCO, value is placed on generating qualified leads for customers (i.e. dealers), building brand loyalty through social fan/follower engagement, and increasing brand awareness. Based on these objectives, AGCO implements engagement and lead generation campaigns through the social hub and spokes, which are evaluated in part by a calculation of return on involvement: the value of fan and follower engagement. AGCO also looks at monthly and quarterly ROI for engagement and conducts e-mail lead generation campaigns through CRM tools on Facebook, all with the end goals of generating consumer/dealer interactions. In this way, AGCO utilizes social media to constantly learn about its audiences and develop continually higher quality fans and followers, with the intent to fill the sales prospect pipeline.

With the constantly evolving nature of social media tools and technology, the medium is sure to continually change the way we live, interact and do business. As such, marketers must keep eyes and ears open to new ways to connect with customers. The hub and spoke model continues to provide a flexible way

Wheel Advantage: Five Benefits of the Hub and Spoke Model

Want to ensure you're in control of and getting value from your multiple social media destinations? To start, Jeremiah Olywang, partner at **Altimeter Group**, and Peter Heffring, CEO of **Expion**, recommend looking at the hub and spoke model. "If you have a lot of spokes—products, departments, franchises, etc.—it's important to leverage the value of them," says Heffring. "Moving content from your hub and into the spokes, while empowering your local staff, is the best way to do that." Here are some Hub and Spoke benefits:

1. Helps move from social media fragmentation to centralization, but allows for local control as well.
2. Higher active engagement, which leads to improved customer loyalty.
3. Better collaboration with employees and customers for more relevant marketing.
4. Get real-time market intelligence on product and service issues.
5. Improved accountability when employees own the customer relationship.

—PR News Editors

to incorporate new tools as they arise, while maintaining a single, manageable point of centralization. **PRN**

Sue Otten is director, corporate marketing and brand communications worldwide at AGCO, a global farm equipment manufacturer.

Making Social Media Work to Your Advantage in Times of Crisis

By Tania Landsberg

In a socially connected world, reputations can be made and broken in a day. On the one hand, social networks are a unique opportunity to reach customers and their networks of friends and associates. On the other, they introduce a dire risk of these audiences turning on you in a very visible and viral way.

With this in mind, and with the uneasy mantle of brand or company custodianship resting on your back, it is easy to assume that people are incorrigibly fickle. And that Facebook and Twitter are demon horses that could buck at any moment.

Admittedly, social media brings with it additional horsepower over traditional media channels, but once you master its ways and add it to your existing arsenal of outlets (such as Internet, TV, radio and print), you can do a lot more than ever before.

A Controlled Conversation

In fact, social media is simply the new reality. You are more at risk if you don't use it than if you do. Once your company starts to matter, anyone with a cellphone can tweet their observations and influence opinion this way or that, within seconds. It is enormously important to be on the lookout and participate.

Since there are both opportunities and risks to adopting a social brand management model, a better way of looking at it is as an opportunity to manage the brand in more and more nuanced ways.

The Web can be your ally, but it's a double-edged sword. Be vigilant and be part of the conversation.

The companies that “get” this tend to study social media obsessively. They use it to reach out to consumers, inviting the conversation about them into a responsive but controlled space, thus allowing their brand to permeate far more pervasive, trusted networks than traditional media. They are building up “social media capital” for a rainy day.

Case in Point

U.S. airline **United Airlines** found out all of the above in 2009—the hard way. As reported widely at the time, musician Dave Carroll and his band were horrified to witness their equipment being flung around carelessly outside the aircraft while they were boarding. In response to their complaints about a broken guitar, the airline was unhelpful, eventually prompting the band to compose and broadcast a song about their experience on YouTube. The rest is Internet history. After so many hits it was all over major news channels, seriously damaging United Airlines' reputation.

No corporate legal or advertising budget can make such a nightmare go away. The lesson here: If you end up on Hellopeter, or someone

sets up a Web site or Facebook page devoted to assassinating your brand, you have to engage.

In other words, once someone complains bitterly about the treatment they received at the hands of your customer service department, no amount of spend on public relations, advertising or even litigation will make the bad taste go away. You have to engage people directly and humbly, and acknowledge respect for their problem, while at the same time respecting the reach and influence of social media networks. Otherwise, you're potentially doing great harm to shareholder value. The Web can be your ally, but it's a double-edged sword. Be vigilant and be part of the conversation.

In the Heavies

In heavy industries like petroleum, mining and manufacturing, reputation management goes one step further into scary territory. A fuel company's reputation is quite literally tied to its societal licence to operate. If it is found to be environmentally irresponsible, it could have its operating permit revoked.

Exacerbating the problem is the complex technical nature of the petroleum and other processing businesses, and the emotive quality of environmental discourse. If an industry stakeholder shuns the ongoing multi-stakeholder discussion about the environment, issues can get away from it very quickly. Issues like greenhouse gases, energy efficiency and pollution are not topics one can circumnavigate in the heavy industries.

The worldwide conversation that is social media gives credence to all viewpoints, so it's the role of communications professionals of all industries to constantly reach out and educate.

Consumers, government and watchdogs must be told about your client or company's social and environmental efforts, the challenges and regulations that shape its actions,

Checklist: Using Social Media to Handle a Crisis

- ❑ **Beware the troll**—It's not a good idea to run away from social criticism, but it's not advisable to enter into all fights either. If an unfounded criticism or combative consumer is merely sounding off and doesn't seem to get too much traction, it may be better to let it be than to be lured into a flaming trap.
- ❑ **Be quick**—Don't delay or you could miss the boat.
- ❑ **Follow the chatter**—Invest in tools that track conversations about your brand and measure its influence. Set up Google Alerts. (It will also help justify corporate spend on this new endeavour.)
- ❑ **Don't be proud**—Acknowledge any errors.
- ❑ **Do something**—It's just like life, really. With so much to tip you off about your brand's effect on people, there's no excuse for not knowing or fixing the problem.
- ❑ **Be the issue**—Use all appropriate channels and link back to your own Web or social presence as the hub of activity concerning your crisis.
- ❑ **Accept all fair comments**—You don't have to entertain profanity, racism or other unconscionable behavior, but you must address reasonable issues.
- ❑ **Spell out your limitations**—Manage expectations by stating up front that you won't be able to resolve all issues the first time around, and other matters of practicality.
- ❑ **Involve your staff**—They have their own social networks and, if well informed, can help the cause.

—Tania Landsberg

Getting Started in Social Media

- **Suspend disbelief.** Get the conversation started internally (guided by external experts, if necessary) to get your executives through the fear and disbelief they are probably feeling.
- **Have a proper social media strategy.** Define what your company wants from an online presence, how it will get there and what's likely to stand in the way.
- **Don't spray and pray.** Adopt a core of social dissemination and response channels that fit your strategy.
- **Don't be lazy.** You can only really build a social brand if you're a prolific user of the channels you adopt.
- **Horses for courses.** Social brand management requires a special blend of qualities—an impeccable news nose and slick deportment in a crowd. In most cases, you need a specialist.

—Tania Landsberg

and its contribution to social endeavours—the entire corporate experience that isn't always reported or reported accurately or fairly. This is because corporate influence and impact is felt far and wide, and it will end up in the sociosphere. It's better to host or participate in

the discussion than to avoid or fend it off as a matter of policy.

A Job With Pressures

At its most fundamental, the job of the marketing and communications or branding official is to shape their brand's reputation. It is not without its pressures: On your shoulders rests the responsibility of protector of your client or your company's right to operate.

Your team supports the entire business, including the operating divisions, marketing, corporate affairs, supply chain, government liaison, human capital and others. All these functions interact with their own unique environments—in many cases comprising consumer, operational, natural, social, economic and political elements. They all have a need to be presented fairly and favorably to their audiences.

On a day-to-day basis, this may mean putting strong, well-branded advertisements in the right places, engaging visibly with consumers on relevant offerings, and engaging with the media, government, state organs, NGOs and so forth.

Nowadays, the enormous exposure of social networks requires you to enlist help beyond that. Your company depends on you to get it right. **PRN**

Tania Landsberg is group communications manager for a major oil company. She has more than 20 years experience in reputations management, crisis communication and profile building.