

Social Media: Implications for reputation and communications management Top 10 factors

As social media and networking becomes increasingly popular, the boundaries between their use in work and social settings continues to blur. This has critical implications for the management of an institution's reputation and profile. There are 10 critical factors to consider:

- [1.] Make sure you have as much control as possible of the critical digital communications channels available to you. Register your name or brand on the key platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn.
- [2.] Monitor online knowledge banks (such as wikis) for the accuracy of entries about your institution, its staff, departments and services.
- [3.] If you don't set up your own social media platforms in the major channels, the chances are someone will do this themselves and you'll then have very little opportunity for control, influence or engagement with the resultant "unofficial" forum. This is important not just on an institutional level, but for specific services, such as alumni relations or education-to-business communications, for example.
- [4.] On the other hand, know when **not** to get involved, or be very clear about your objectives and style of involvement! Users of some social media channels will resent attempts by an institution to "get down with the kids", for example!
- [5.] Monitor what people say about you on Twitter, blogs and discussion channels: respond if you need to, to ensure accuracy or resolve misconceptions.
- [6.] Make sure there is synergy between your offline (hard copy) and online (digital, web-based) institutional

brand. Although hard copy and digital communications can have very different objectives, it is critical that there is a match in terms of the promises, values and opinions expressed by an institution across all its media channels.

- [7.] Remember that social media provides some of the greatest opportunities, but also the greatest risks, to influence perceptions about an institution. This is because it is facilitated by the digital equivalent of word-of-mouth communications. It can, simply, take an organisation out of the conversation very easily, as social media users bypass an institution to comment upon it among themselves.
- [8.] A major positive opportunity is to enable open discussion about topical issues through your institution's own social media: this can have great benefits to institutions in building up cohesion among interest groups such as business partners, alumni and opinion formers.
- [9.] Major opportunities exist for institutions to raise profile, manage their reputation and increase interest in their activities through podcasts and the live broadcast of events, ranging from open days to lectures and seminars.
- [10.] Be realistic: the concept of "user generated content" is core to the future of communications. Long gone are the days when an institution could control the majority of what was said about it: now, stakeholders expect to be involved and to have the opportunity to comment. While it is possible to manage some aspects of social media, the reality is that it is better to engage with it and be part of it in a positive way. It cannot be ignored!

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