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## Social media's impact on PR, online demo tips, and more

### Toolbox

Irene Chang PR Week USA May 1 2007 01:55

### **Comments made in social media communities impact people's perceptions of companies' products or brands. How should PR pros best use this information?**

"It's a given that people are talking about your brands and products in social media communities," says Blake Cahill of Visible Technologies. The question for marketers and PR pros is: "Are you listening?"

The unique insights being expressed in social media communities can help PR pros understand the positive, negative, and neutral sentiments being expressed by consumers.

"It's like a constant, real-time focus group," notes Cahill. However, he adds, listening is only the starting point. Once you know what is being said, the question is who is saying it and how can you engage in the dialogue. The issue of engagement is the next frontier for marketers, but engagement requires transparency and delicacy.

Members of social networking communities will embrace engagement if it's genuine and not generic PR or marketing talk, Cahill points out. By examining what is being said, who is saying it, and proper engagement, marketers can enhance or promote positives about their brand or products. Additionally, they can post appreciative commentary, embrace negative feedback, share future product direction, or take corrective actions on misinformation.

### **Online demos**

*What is the key to a successful online demonstration?*

"An online product demo is like driving a race car," explains ON24's Len Marotta. "If the car suddenly stalls halfway through the course, the message is jumbled, the audience is confused, and it negatively impacts a company's reputation."

Marotta emphasizes that the key to a successful application or software demo online is ensuring a smooth user experience. He suggests using a technology platform that enables live and real-time demos to thousands of simultaneous viewers without any degradation in quality.

It is also vital, he adds, to incorporate flexible features for whiteboarding, and having several

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presenters give a desktop presentation and pushing polls. Lastly, it's essential to provide a hassle-free way to access demos online.

"An online demo can be a cost-effective alternative to an in-person one," says Marotta. "But when hundreds or thousands of people are watching, skipping out on one of the above suggestions can outweigh the cost and time savings."

### **Crisis response**

*What are some of the guidelines for responding to the media in a timely fashion during a crisis in today's environment?*

At one time, organizations had about 60 to 90 minutes to prepare to meet the press. Not anymore, explains Ken Haseley of The Ammerman Experience.

"Today," he notes, "you have about 15 minutes because of mobile phones with cameras, the Internet, including YouTube, the 24-hour news cycle, and TV's frequent use of "cut-ins" - interrupting programming for breaking news.

Technology has made live coverage possible from just about anywhere. Even print media can go "live" via the Internet. "In today's cluttered, highly competitive media environment, journalists are under even greater pressure to be first to cover your crisis," Haseley says.

Errors in reporting, if any, can be corrected later. People expect - and get - instant news; they expect an instant response from a corporate spokesperson. Haseley advises not to guess or speculate, but to tell what you do know, even if it's partial information.

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