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PR IN THE TIME OF TWITTER, FACEBOOK AND LINKEDIN

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It is not just about setting up a social media profile

Apart from connecting millions of users worldwide, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter have turned into modern-day PR and advertising platforms. These days, they are most brands' go-to solutions for social media, and they have become among the most powerful web marketing tools available. In fact, **Don Anderson**, Senior Vice President and Head of Regional Digital Strategic Integration for FleishmanHillard, attests to this. He told *Perspectives @SMU* that while their PR firm still provides traditional events and PR releases, these have to deliberately intersect with digital and social PR.

"What it is becoming is more of an integrated play. So you'll end up getting a mix of options, be it an event or a press release combined with the social digital elements. What we're seeing is integration becoming a core element of any type of communications programme. So we are offering a larger-scope model of digital media and social media combined to drive conversations around brands," he says.

But Anderson clarifies that it is not as easy as setting up a Facebook page, LinkedIn group or promoting a post on Twitter. "For social media, we believe you need to have social within the company DNA; it's not just a Facebook page. It's part of your methodology in terms of being able to tap new audiences through new communication styles and techniques."

Brands can't just mindlessly create websites and bombard their consumers' Facebook feeds with endless updates, argues Anderson. "[Some brands] build their Facebook pages without thinking 'What is my content and engagement strategy? How do I sustain it?' The challenge that many companies have is figuring out where social media fits into their corporate strategy."

There has to be a science behind an online communications strategy, a careful consideration on what to proffer in the digital media and how to engage the consumers, Anderson says. At FleishmanHillard, "we sit down with those who are entering this space to accurately and properly track it, plan it, move it out into the external space. It is a build, not a sudden launch."

ONLINE STRATEGISING FOR MARKETING VIS-À-VIS CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Anderson advises to pay attention to what role social media should play for your brand. Is it for marketing purposes? Do you need Facebook for corporate communications?

Traditionally, marketing would need a campaign-driven approach to generate hype and enormous spikes in activity, while ongoing communications is best for corporate communications to sustain the conversation and engagement of the audience. Whether coaxing the customers to “like” your page or promoting the brand’s image through a shared article, it’s important, Anderson notes, to be truthful at all times.

“Social media is a communications platform: we tell stories. Facebook is all about telling individual stories, and brands have to tell their own individual stories to make some sort of connection with their consumers and audiences. If you are not projecting your persona as truthfully as possible, individuals within that social space have ways to undo you. They will [eventually] find out,” he says.

ON REACHING OUT TO MORE PEOPLE

There are many ways to measure the key performance indicators (KPI) of a digital PR strategy: page views, click-through rates, cost-per-click, number of followers, amount of content consumed, or number of times the information has been shared. “Unfortunately, most companies don’t have an idea of what those KPIs should be. They say, ‘I want to see sales.’ Social media won’t always guarantee sales. It’s a form of communication that leads to some form of engagement, and you can then potentially exact that sale or that conversion,” says Anderson.

So, what is the best way to ensure outstanding KPI performance? Drive excellent content, says Anderson. “At the end of the day, the audience has to resonate with your content. Do they care about it? Why do they care? What does it do to my life? What are you showing me that’s different from what others are showing me? Will it get me talking about your brand?”

Whether you’re employing traditional PR or turning to Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter to bring awareness to your brand, remember the new rule of engagement: Conversations are king.

Don Anderson was a speaker at the digital:works 2013 certification workshop organised jointly by SMU’s Centre for Marketing Excellence and the Omnicom Group