

Social media – observations and recommendations

Overview

In this document we have broken down some of the key forms of social media in order to provide some tips about how best to approach them.

Social and new media are elements of the overall media mix and deserve a proportional response. Interaction with these forms of media shouldn't be undertaken as merely a reaction to a fad, there needs to be a campaign reason behind it. The way in which these tools are used should depend on the personality, objectives and target audience of the company and campaign, so as a company you should decide what works for you.

Social media can be used as a route to your audience or as a way to gain information. It's as valuable to listen as it is to speak. In fact it's probably better to spend time listening or monitoring before you start contributing, something that at EML we have been doing for a while on our own behalf.

While all PR is uncertain to some extent and editorial independence allows journalists to write their own opinions, an unbiased approach is imposed by the publishers and copy is subject to rigorous editing. This is not the case with social media, leaving companies open to potentially negative feedback, based on subjective un-moderated opinions. Caution is therefore advised in what you say and where you say it.

Blogging

- ▶ Before anyone starts participating in blogs, there needs to be a corporate policy and guidelines in place on employees' use of and participation in blogging.
- ▶ There are several ways to approach blogging. For example you might influence others to include content about the company on their blog, comment on other people's blogs or begin a corporate blog to be a 'voice and personality' of the company.
- ▶ There is bound to be further growth in this area particularly as traditional media dwindles and evolves as a result of the downturn.
- ▶ Corporate blogs are often approached with some trepidation as it is perceived that PRs often write them. As such, if a corporate blog is used it is essential that it is written or thoroughly checked by employees of the company who actually have something interesting to contribute.
- ▶ It is also crucial in the case of a corporate blog that there is a quick approvals process in place so that posts are timely and remain topical.
- ▶ If a company wishes to set up a blog, it works only if it is 'alive', i.e. if it is contributed to regularly, therefore it works best if responsibility for the content is shared between a team of bloggers. This means that not only will content be posted regularly but that the team can moderate each blog before posting, to eliminate any potentially inappropriate statements. This is the method EML uses for its own blog.
- ▶ In trying to influence bloggers to include objectively written content about your company, they should be treated like journalists. It is very easy to identify a long list of blogs about, for instance, GPS - but it is only through monitoring them over time that we come to understand the bloggers of influence with a wide following. It is hard to identify key bloggers, because readership is difficult to determine.

<http://technorati.com/blogs/directory/> is a good place to start picking people to target.

Facebook

- ▼ As with blogging, a corporate policy and guidelines need to be established regarding employees' use of Facebook.
- ▼ It is our view that over time, social media will start self-segmenting in terms of terms of function, with Facebook continuing to hold its place as a personal tool for social interaction. Twitter on the other hand looks likely to evolve into a professional / business tool.
- ▼ Corporate facebook pages – these can be a good idea if your business targets or impacts individual users or consumers, but this need to be assessed on a per company basis and even then Facebook will not suit everyone.

LinkedIn

- ▼ Watch this space! While its growth has not been meteoric like its other counterparts (due to its business focus, rather than some of the other more consumer-orientated social media tools) LinkedIn is increasingly being used to bring people together with functions such as message sharing, rather than serving as just merely a business contacts list.
- ▼ Consider joining or initiating a discussion group on LinkedIn to raise your company's profile.
- ▼ Participants in the semiconductor and med-tech industry are particularly keen on this particular social network.

Twitter

- ▼ Twitter a boom area for social media has experienced a rapid increase in popularity, but we expect growth to flatten as the "new toy" effect subsides.
- ▼ At this moment we're seeing Twitter posts often being used as a flag to alert followers to a blog/website or link to more information.
- ▼ The media often use Twitter to secure interest in a story they have covered or to gather information for a story they are writing.
- ▼ Some companies do uses Twitter e.g. Cadence CEO, but there are very few credible examples of companies using Twitter well.
- ▼ We're finding that industry analysts use Twitter to gather information and solicit .
- ▼ As with blogs, Tweets need to be meaningful to secure followers, and when beginning a Twitter campaign, you should certainly listen to others first, judge who needs to be followed and what garners interest, before getting involved and contributing.
- ▼ Learning from the blog experiences, it is certain that corporate Tweets will come across as bland if they are just used to push news out. However using Tweets to draw attention to a new launch / event / roadshow / report, could be a good additional tool for publicity. If used judiciously!
- ▼ We recommend that Twitter users install the third party applications available for Twitter to get the most out of the network, this is especially useful when it comes to searching.

YouTube

- ▶ YouTube continues to remain a new media phenomenon but one gaining increasing corporate use.
- ▶ Beyond viral video promotion which can be very effective in B2B communication we are seeing a number of companies posting seminars, presentations, corporate videos and other materials on YouTube as a matter of course. It is debatable whether posting materials on YouTube has any merit over posting it on your own corporate website apart from the fact that it will be available to a much broader audience and will be found more easily.
- ▶ The disadvantage is that you cannot choose your audience, but they tend to self certify instead!

Wikipedia

- ▶ Wikipedia remains a popular source of quick reference and cross-checking on a variety of technical topics. It is a particularly useful reference tool for journalists trying to get a quick background on new technologies especially in markets such as India and Asia, where the media are more generalist than in markets such as US and European markets.
- ▶ Hence if there is an area of emerging technology that a company is involved in it is worth the effort to create a Wiki entry explaining it. Care should be taken to maintain a neutral aspect as any tendency towards self-promotion can be counterproductive and the entry is likely to be flagged by the moderators as a corporate wiki.