

Public Relations Vs. "Consumer Generated Media" from Bloggers

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Sample of Content:

Will PR firms figure out how to control consumer generated media pouring out of hundreds of thousands of blogs daily?

Content:

With the rise of Blogs across the U.S., a new type of information dissemination has grown to mammoth proportionsâ€”consumer generated media produced by blogs. Pew Internet & American Life study reports that 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults who use the internet say they have created a blog or web-based diary. That represents approximately 8 million Americans. Twenty-seven percent of internet users say they read blogs, totaling 32 million people. What most people donâ€™t know is that search engine spidering technology is attracted to web sites whose content â€œchangesâ€• constantly. This means that blog content has a higher likelihood to find its way to the top of

search engine results as compared with static web site content. This is the primary reason for the POWER behind the growth of the blog as a media outlet.

The birth of blog related consumer generated media has played havoc with the fundamental goals of public relations firms. As late as ten years ago, all a good PR firm had to do to control the image of its clients was to maintain good relations with the three major TV networks, the fifteen major hub newspapers that feed content to hundreds of other daily newspapers, and the 3 or 4 major radio networks. Currently, a PR firm has to contend not only with the mainstream media, cable and radio networks, but also a tidal wave of information flooding onto the internet from blogs.

This new wave of internet related content may not have been a problem if the role of the World Wide Web had remained in the hands of the universities library system and DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Project Agency) where the internet was spawned. Unfortunately for those companies recently targeted by negative commentary via the blog network, the following chilling internet user statistics are quite relevant. On a typical day at the end of 2004, some 70 million American adults logged onto the Internet to use email, get news, access government information, check out health and medical information, participate in auctions, book travel reservations, research their genealogy, gamble, seek out romantic partners, and engage in countless other activities. That represents a 37 percent increase from the 51 million Americans who were online on an average day in 2000 when the Pew Internet & American Life Project began its study of online life. This trend is ONLY going up.

Another Pew study identified that fact that over 50% of all online purchases are now PRECEDED by an internet search. Thirty-six percent of all internet users under the age of 30 say that they could not live without internet search engines. This illustrates what many ad agency executives now take for grantedâ€”that people, in higher and higher numbers, are using internet information, not mainstream media related advertising, to make buying decisions. Every day, more and more people are turning on computers versus the TV set for information and entertainment.

Public Relations Firms Must Adopt New Strategies

Public relations executives and professionals must begin to develop new strategies for controlling what is said about their clients on the internet. This can be done in one of two ways: 1) focus efforts towards influencing bloggers in terms of what they are saying about their clients and change any negative attitudes (the way PRs used to address potential negative messages distributed through the limited number of mainstream media outlets of yester year) 2) control what is found on the first half dozen pages of internet search results when their clientâ€™s information is being looked up. The goal of the latter solution is far more attainable than the first solution. With millions of bloggers, and the number is growing hourly, pumping out terabytes of information each and every day, control of their message is an impossible task. Only through some revolutionary content control techniques can a PR begin to win the battle with the bloggers.

This report will track the progress of one company, In Touch Media Group, in its daily efforts to control client search results through tools it has recently developed and streamlined (www.intouchmediagroup.com).

ITMG, one of just a few companies that have been awarded the prestigious Google Adwords Qualified Company status given out to experts in their technology, created a two-part plan to dominate the initial search results found whenever someone was seeking information on any of its clients. The process, known as Press Direct, involves

creating professionally written, interest grabbing articles and press releases that are linked in terms of story content and then distributing the articles to dozens of article content hubs. These content sites provide news stories, articles, and commentary to tens of thousands of users such as TV and radio news directors, print editors, popular web sites, news sites and other information destinations. ITMG subsequently distributes the related press release, which is targeted to media contacts, after the prior articles begin popping up all over the internet.

The article hubs aren't just any media outlets. These sites are selected because of their substantial distribution reach and Alexa ranking (Alexa.com is tantamount to the Neilson of the internet world. Alexa ranks web sites worldwide in accordance with their visitor traffic levels). Each article and related press release is search engine optimized based on the most popular keywords connected to a given industry so as to make it search engine friendly before placement. Once the initial article is submitted and that same article finds its way onto thousands of other web sites via the content hubs, a press release version is distributed to major wire services and to a large home grown list of media contacts owned by ITMG, numbered in the thousands.

"We figured out that we should write an appropriate "linked article" in conjunction with a press release", describes Bob Cefail, Chairman of In Touch Media Group, "and place the article into as many of these article hubs as possible. The effect was breathtaking when we saw that the article we had written was sweeping across the internet". What ITMG figured out was to first lay the ground work for a press release through the use of a well designed article. What ITMG didn't expect was that the article, placed in the hubs, and the follow-up press release would completely dominate the first few pages of any internet search on almost any topic thereby, pushing negative content back into the back pages of the search results.

When considering the fact that huge article hubs have ever-changing content numbering in the thousands of daily changes, one can see why the search engine spiders are highly attracted to the article hubs. One can liken these content hubs to "super blogs" in terms of their effectiveness in search engine ranking versus normal blogs. The key to In Touch Media Group's success can be tracked back to the ancient teachings of a Chinese Military figure named Sun Tzu. The famous general wrote in his well known book, The Art of War, that when one has a larger opponent, one must get a bigger friend. By using what amounts to "bigger blogs" in its efforts to help its client, In Touch Media Group was able to out- create negative consumer generated media produced by consumer blogs.

The Press Direct campaign also accomplished several other significant results. With one movie company client, the Press Direct service resulted in over 400 media pick-ups of just one press release story over only a 7-day period as reported by PRWeb.com. In another case, an ITMG faith-based media client, whose Alexa ranking was 2,398,449, had its ranking bettered to under 94,000 in less than a month!

With consumer generated media creating as much as 40% of all search results presently, a substantial percentage of which is negative in nature, potential candidates for search engine content management and control includes politicians, entertainment, sports, and large public corporations. Consumer product companies are at particular risk as concerns negative blog commentary because their products or services reach such a large mixture of clientele. If just a small percentage of clients find reason to complain, a large company's search results can be critically damaged and no amount of traditional PR firm repair work can remedy their online image. Only a highly targeted campaign involving the aid of article content hubs, search engine optimized articles and press releases can stem the tide of negative commentary.

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