

A GOTHAM RESEARCH GROUP SPECIAL REPORT

Managing Your Corporate Reputation in the Blogosphere

- Corporate communications executives must be able to manage their company's reputation in the blogosphere – but few have developed a systematic, sophisticated strategy to do so.
- Interviews with our panel of leading bloggers reveal that the familiar strategy of maintaining a company blog is not sufficient. Instead, corporate communications executives must seek out and actively engage bloggers on their own terms.
- The blogosphere is a **community** with well-defined values and norms. If you follow and respect the community's norms, you can engage bloggers and effectively manage and enhance your company's reputation.

The Keys to Effectively Engaging the Blogging Community

There are, of course, different types of bloggers – e.g., those who rely on blogging for all or part of their income, “hobbyist” bloggers, and “institutional” bloggers – but our research shows that influential bloggers of all types abide by a common set of norms.

1. **No engagement, no influence.**
Influential voices in the blogosphere submit interesting posts, actively engage in Q&A about their posts, and regularly comment on others' posts. A corporate communications strategy built around submitting one-time, “drive-by” posts simply does not work – a company must commit to regular engagement with the blogging community if it wants to have influence in the blogosphere.
2. **Take a principled stand.**
Even though self-interest obviously drives corporate activity, bloggers respect companies that take a stand or support an initiative on behalf of a principle that transcends short-term corporate goals. A company that frames its positions in terms of broad societal goals gets a better hearing in the blogosphere.
3. **Actions speak louder than words.**
As befits their high level of education and affluence, bloggers pride themselves on being smart, knowledgeable, and sophisticated. They believe that they are immune to standard PR/marketing tactics and messaging, and they are offended when they suspect such tactics are being used to “manipulate” them. As a consequence, company communications must avoid standard “corporate-speak” and must be accompanied by substantive action (or at least the promise of such action).
4. **Institutions are guilty until proven innocent.**
Irrespective of their ideological orientation, bloggers share a profound distrust of powerful, mainstream institutions, including both parties in Washington, D.C. (i.e., “The Village”), traditional media, and corporations. These institutions are typically viewed as corrupt, unprincipled, and elitist. This bias does not mean that companies cannot get a fair hearing in the blogosphere. They can succeed if they use the right strategies – but the wind is always in their face.
5. **Be transparent.**
Bloggers value what they believe most traditional institutions lack – honesty and a willingness to acknowledge mistakes. Therefore, a company's credibility in the blogosphere is enhanced when it acknowledges information that bloggers already know (or think they know), such as past errors and self-interested motives for supporting certain positions.

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The Keys to Effectively Engaging the Blogging Community (cont.)

6. Accept the noise.

As in any community, the blogging community has its share of noisy, irrational, and obnoxious members. The community tolerates these individuals (albeit grudgingly) as a necessary by-product of the blogging culture. A company must do the same by accepting the fact that “success” in the blogosphere does not mean silencing or winning over all critics.

7. It takes time.

Time and effort are needed to become a respected, influential member of the blogging community. Bloggers must see evidence of sustained engagement before they listen to *anyone* – especially those who represent mainstream institutions, such as corporations.

8. There are no shortcuts.

A senior corporate executive recently had his PR representative contact a prominent blog to ask if he could write a piece for the blog’s “front page.” Not only was the offer refused, but the company was publicly derided for its “cluelessness.” Successfully engaging the blogging community requires involvement by senior communications executives – this is not something to be delegated to junior staff or tech-savvy interns.

A FEW TIPS FOR ENGAGING THE PROGRESSIVE BLOGOSPHERE

- Net Neutrality is very important to bloggers right now. Speak intelligently on this issue and it will help to open the doors to many progressive bloggers and readers.
- Two words – Bill Moyers. He is a beloved and respected figure in the community. References to his shows, even in passing, will help build credibility.
- Put up a diary on the Daily Kos front page. And, don’t forget to put up a “Tip Jar” in the first comment after your diary, or readers will know you are just stopping by to promote something and that you are not a member of the community.
- Consider buying blog ads. Economic times are tough, especially for bloggers who are either wholly or partially reliant on blog income.
- Post and comment during peak activity times, between noon and 2:00 pm. Contrary to what many expect, late night blogging is relatively quiet.

More on Managing Your Corporate Reputation in the Blogosphere

This report summary is based on findings from one-on-one, in-depth interviews with a panel of prominent bloggers from a variety of backgrounds, conducted October 19-30, 2009.

The full report is available by subscription and contains more detailed findings, as well as specific strategies for reaching key segments of the blogging community, including leading progressive bloggers.

We also offer consulting services designed to help companies increase their visibility and influence in the blogosphere. Our team is led by digital practitioners and communications experts who plan and deploy online programs that engage prominent bloggers and activate influential communities.

For more information please contact Jeffrey Levine at 917-374-6704 or jlevine@gothamresearchgroup.com.

Gotham Research Group

Gotham Research Group is a New York-based research and consulting firm advising corporations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and electoral campaigns on issues of communication, reputation, and strategy.

