

CITY IN A TIZZY OVER BLOGGER

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But it is not the mayor's words that have tongues a-waggin'; instead it is the keystrokes of an anonymous blogger who is inside - or being fed from deep inside - the bowels of city hall.

Of course if this blogger actually had the courage to identify him or herself then the actual news would come out and some of the scintillating adjectives would go away.

Nonetheless, as a business owner or entrepreneur you may ask, "Why do I care and what does this have to do with risk management anyway?"

The answer is quite a lot, actually.

Blogs and social media are now as ubiquitous as e-mail. And companies, governments, politicians and the media who choose to ignore these facets of the wired world do so at considerable peril to their reputations, if not their bottom lines.

To start, news is generated online 24-7. And recent surveys stateside note that 70 per cent of traditional (print, radio and TV) journalists hunt for story ideas from blog postings. Moreover, the convergence media dynamic has driven mainstream opinion-leading journalists into the daily blogosphere. From general politics to specific policy areas like defence to environmental activism right down to keeping tabs on individual companies like banks, oil or big pharma, what is being said online about these players is constantly evolving, shaping public opinion and consumer/voter expectations.

Your employees may even be spending time in cyberspace right now in a way that is damaging to your organization's future. Forget somebody surfing the web for travel deals or a new car; they may be active in a Facebook group that is speaking out against the new corporate plan, just as one example.

Monitoring and managing this space should be part and parcel of any entity's public affairs (branding, media, community and government relations) suite of activities. And

not just purely from a defensive posture. Indeed, leading companies and organizations are actively trying to shape debate and stakeholder behaviour via the web.

As an admitted Internet junkie (I may need counselling), I say organizations wishing to jump into this sphere should do so with professional help as opposed to simply viewing this as another task to slough off to the IT or web folks.

Just as you don't ask a plumber to fix your electrical issues, nor should you ask a generalist to delve into this unique and expanding area.

And this isn't a one-time expenditure. It should be built into your public affairs/communications budget with metrics and understandable metrics on how you are impacting or saving the bottom line, etc.

So if words and terms like Facebook, MySpace, Classmates, Reunion, LinkedIn, YouTube, StumbleUpon, Digg and RSS, (just to rhyme off a few) are foreign to you or evoke images of your youngsters on the computer and nothing more, your firm's objectives are already at risk and you better get to managing them fast. Just as it is important to secure your facilities, protect your data and contingency-plan to assure your employees, business partners and customers.

The electronic ether beyond your doors also poses threats and dangers.

In terms of traditional IT security initiatives, Internet risk management in terms of content is also the way forward.

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