

Marketing Minute ~ Marketing Lessons from “Brand Obama”

I recently read this article and found it very interesting. I would like to share it with you here. It was written by By Aaron Kwittken - Entrepreneur.com .

Politics aside, most people would agree that President Obama is a masterful communicator. Obama is really our nation's first public figure to adeptly embrace the full power of the new media buffet. This president is seizing both traditional and new media opportunities to deploy his messages in both an expeditious and ubiquitous manner.

True, Obama's not perfect and he's made several misstatements (as has his gaffe-prone vice president), but his errors are actually quite small when measured against the enormous volume of his communications activities. According to a recent story in *New York Magazine*, Obama "has hosted 15 town-hall meetings; appeared in more than 800 images on the White House Flickr photo-stream; and held four prime-time press conferences, the same number held by George W. Bush in his entire presidency."

Communications (especially public relations) for any brand, be it a person or organization, is inherently a non-linear process. For decades now, we've been fighting for linearity by pursuing traditional pathways to key audiences, such as exhibiting at trade shows, pushing out press releases, meeting with reporters, etc. These activities still have purpose, but their impact will become diminished absent a broader strategic view of PR and its value.

What we really want is control over our message. Advertising buys control because you have final say over the content and where and how often the ad is placed--but it is openly biased, with commercial gain (sales) as the goal. PR, on the other hand, earns us credibility because seemingly unbiased third parties (i.e., media) are helping to propagate our message for us. PR is, in a way, a cloaked way to sell our wares without explicitly appearing to do so.

The Obama PR machine seems to be working for "brand Obama" and offers message control lessons for us all.

Transparent

The best way to get something is to give something up first. Transparency is no longer just a buzz word, but an imperative for businesses of all sizes. For example, Obama has committed to publish all executive orders and proclamations on the White House website, something unprecedented.

Companies often get in their own way when it comes to practicing transparency because they think it will mean they have to dispense trade secrets or data that undermine their ability to compete.

This is not so. Transparency means companies should no longer appear to be hiding anything from their customers, from sourcing and manufacturing to disclosing conflicts of interest and a rationale for pricing.

Some industries are especially vulnerable to the drive for transparency, especially financial services, health care and our government. That said--all businesses and entities will be better served by using transparency as part of their brand promise, just as Obama has done. Why? Doing so will help create new levels of trust between you and your stakeholders, and that will lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for everyone.

Expedient

A great PR program enables a company to have its messages placed among key media in a frequent and timely manner. Contrary to popular belief, frequency is not achieved through a blitzkrieg of press releases. Rather, it is by having bloggers, reporters, analysts and other brand influencers cite you as an expert for his or her "story." He who speaks first often gets the media stage.

Of course it's important to focus on what you're going to say, but don't overthink it or let an endless team of legal and strategic advisors mess with your messages. If you do--and most companies do--then it will be too late to comment on a story because it took two days to approve a message that needed to be disseminated within 10 minutes. And then you wonder why your competitor got the quote.

The same holds true in times of crisis. A "no comment" from you is an opportunity for someone else. Worse than "no comment" is a notation in the story that calls to the company went unreturned or company executives were unable or unavailable to comment.

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The president makes a habit to quickly respond to issues either directly or through his communications team; that said, sometimes he moves too fast, as in his response to the Gates incident or his Special Olympics misstep on Leno earlier this year.

Omnipresent

Not to be confused with "omnipotent" (Donald Trump's aspiration), omnipresent means making sure that your messages are strategically disseminated in all the channels that your key stakeholders are listening to, viewing, visiting or reading.

According [Accuracy in Media](#), Obama is spending \$5M a year alone on staff salaries devoted to communications with great emphasis on internet driven communications (Facebook and Twitter), minority-targeted communications, town hall meetings, press conferences and television appearances.

For most consumer-focused companies, being present and proactive on Facebook and Twitter is an important way to stay relevant to and connected with consumers. For B2B companies, utilizing other data-rich resources such as Hoovers and LinkedIn may be more effective.

All companies should look to social media to at least monitor, listen to and acknowledge what their stakeholders are saying about their brand. Start with baby steps, making sure that you are on Wikipedia and that your website and your releases are search engine optimized. If you blog, do it regularly or don't do it all. There is no one-size-fits-all social media tactic or program, but piloting a few social media initiatives will no doubt help you continue to protect and grow your brand and your business.

Obama's approach won't be the new norm for communications; it IS the new norm for us all.

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