

public relations professionals understand the new technology and its capabilities and increase their competence in employing and monitoring it. Those who can blend the traditional skills of writing and media and communications knowledge with the

online skills of the Internet—particularly the generation that has grown up with social media as its preferred communication default mechanism—will find a rewarding calling in the practice of public relations in the 21st century.⁴²

Discussion Starters

1. What is the status of the Internet and World Wide Web in public relations today?
2. How has social media affected journalism? Commerce? Internal communications?
3. How has email changed the way people and organizations communicate?
4. How has social media changed the way journalists look at email?
5. How have blogs influenced public relations practice?
6. What is the significance of Facebook relative to public relations practice?
7. What is the significance of Twitter relative to public relations practice?
8. How have companies used YouTube in crisis?
9. How should organizations protect themselves from online attack?
10. What is the difference between an intranet and an extranet?

Pick of the Literature

Social Media and Public Relations

Deidre Breakenridge, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2012

There is no more knowledgeable public relations counselor on uses of social media and the Internet than Deidre Breakenridge. The New Jersey consultant has written a number of books on public relations uses of the new media. This is the best.

Early in the book, author Breakenridge confronts public relations practitioners with the exhortation that “Social media requires you to shift your mindset to unite communications and collaborative technology.” She then goes on to introduce

and explain eight new practices that social media introduces to public relations professionals: (1) policy maker, (2) internal collaborator, (3) technology tester, (4) communications organizer, (5) pre-crisis doctor, (6) relationship analyzer, (7) reputation task force member, and (8) metrics master.

She examines each of these elements in creative detail, diagramming their relationship to the overall business entity and their navigation in terms of social media. This is original thinking at its finest.

Case Study

Ronald McDonald's Brush with Antisocial Media

In the 21st century, the face of public relations is changing, largely due to the phenomenon of social media. And that ain't always such a good thing. Just ask the world's largest fast food chain, McDonald's.

McDonald's, with its franchise known throughout the world, is one of the globe's most well-known and progressive companies (Figure 10-11). And that includes its use of social media.

McDonald's has a director of social media who has instituted a robust, multiplatform program. Rick Won acknowledges that with respect to the Internet and social media, “You don't control things. You can only hope to steer things in certain directions.” Indeed, Mr. Won has led the fast food franchiser with substantive offerings in terms of video campaigns, hashtags, and blogger outreach programs.



FIGURE 10-11 Ronald in happier times.

Ronald McDonald joins Olympic gold medalists Carl Lewis and Jackie-Joyner Kersee to celebrate “Go Active Day” in Athens, Greece. (Courtesy of O’Dwyerpr.com)

The latter has been particularly successful, with McDonald’s working with bloggers to boost its brand impact. As Mr. Won put it, “We want to be transparent in our relationships, and we want our bloggers to be authentic in their opinions.”

As a consequence, McDonald’s never insists that its affiliated bloggers write a word about its products. When they do, sometimes the write-up isn’t flattering. Mr. Won says that’s good. “We don’t want them to hold back if they have an opinion that isn’t totally positive.”

Such an enlightened social media approach has won McDonald’s viral credibility.

But there have been missteps, two in particular that McDonald’s learned from but just as likely wished had never happened. Both are a reminder of how treacherous the social media terrain occasionally turns out to be.

Twitterverse Turns Racist

One weekend in June 2011, a sign, ostensibly placed in a McDonald’s window, made its way around the Twitterverse, with the hashtag #seriouslymcdonalds.

The sign said, “Due in part to a recent string of robberies, African-American customers are now required to pay an additional fee of \$1.50 a transaction.”

Horror of horrors: Mickey D’s had been disgracefully scammed.

Immediately, McDonald’s responded on its Twitter page that the “pic is a senseless & ignorant hoax McD’s values ALL our customers. Diversity runs deep in our culture on both sides of the counter.”

The company didn’t stop there, reiterating the next day on Twitter, “That Seriously McDonalds picture is a hoax.”

McDonald’s followers quickly chimed in that the toll-free number listed on the bottom of the phony picture belonged to competitor KFC.

Nonetheless, the hoax made the Twitter rounds on a super-sized scale.

Discomforting “Mc Nuggets”

A year later, the company tried again on Twitter by setting up a 24-hour campaign hashtag, #MeetTheFarmers, to attempt to drive people toward commercials highlighting some of the real-life farmers and ranchers who supply McDonald’s with its ingredients.

The commercials were the height of “authenticity,” with the farmers and ranchers dispensing nuggets of wisdom about their harvests and herds. And McDonald’s thought a Twitter campaign including those nuggets would move it up the trends lists on the Twitter homepage and help the brand.

The campaign proceeded smoothly enough until social media director Won moved the conversation to another hashtag, #McDStories, to continue the conversation among their customers.

That’s where the well-intentioned campaign hit the Mcrails. Social media director Won monitored in horror as a barrage of negative comments (see next page) came in fast and furious—from poor working conditions at McDonald’s stores to contaminated food.

Tonia Leung @ToniaLeung ◀ Reply ◀ Retweet ★ Favorite
 Lost my appetite RT @digitalSicilian @NikasTweets McDonald's hashtag campaign goes horribly wrong: read.bi/wGKKfZ #McDSt
 ◀ In reply to Salvatore Filippone

Eric Miller Jr. @EricMillerJr
 Reading all these #McDStories is helping to keep me on my diet

Esam Sultan @esamsultan
 I remember in Kent with @fabrebash4 years ago he nearly choked bones in his nuggets. They gave him £2 refund so all was good #McDStories

Kamille Elahi @KamilleElahi
 #McDstories saw a woman wiping a table with a dirty cloth. table still full of smudges of leftover burgers ew!

Oops! Within minutes, the company's social media success had crumbled to social media disaster.

A little more than an hour after the tidal wave of #McDStories negativity began, Mr. Won killed the Twitter campaign, pulling the hashtag off the Twitter homepage.

McDonald's and Mr. Won, shaken from the social media blitzkrieg, had learned some valuable lessons. It's fine to be

creative with hashtags, Mr. Won said, but it's better not to create tags that people assume mean something they don't. If anything, the social media director concluded, "the lesson of #McDStories is that we can be an easy target for people who are uninformed."

Or out to get you! (Figure 10-12)



FIGURE 10-12 Lost in space.

Twitterspace, that is. Ronald McDonald and his colleagues were left up in the air in 2012, when a seemingly harmless Twitter campaign went horribly off the rails. (Photo: imagostock/Newscom)

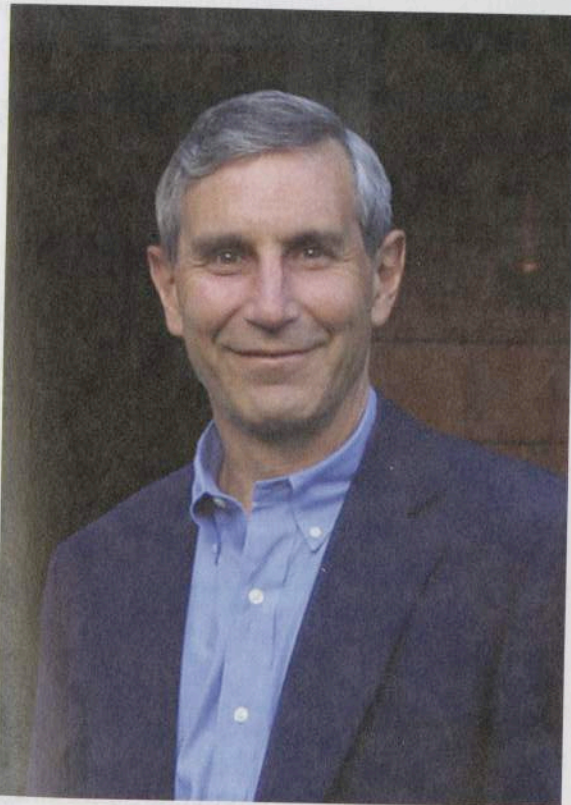
Questions

1. What do you think of McDonald's social media strategy in general?
2. How would you characterize McDonald's handling of the racist tweet?
3. What would you have done differently relative to the #McDStories controversy?

For further information, see Brett Johnson, "McDonald's Feeling the Heat After Racist Sign Hoax," Ragan PR Daily, June 13, 2011; Keith O'Brien, "How McDonald's Came Back Bigger Than Ever," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2012; and Matt Wilson, "McDonald's Exec: 'You Don't Control' Social Media," Ragan PR Daily, May 21, 2012.

From the Top

An Interview with Richard Edelman



Richard Edelman is president and CEO of Edelman, the world's largest public relations firm with 3,500 employees in 66 offices worldwide. Mr. Edelman is also the public relations executive most associated with the Internet and new technology. Under his leadership, Edelman has distinguished itself not only in traditional public relations areas but as a pioneer in the new media. A graduate of Harvard College and the Harvard Business School, Mr. Edelman is one of the only public relations executives to write his own blog.

How has the Internet changed the public relations business?

The Web has changed the PR business by giving us access to budgets that we never saw before . . . by allowing us to make each of our clients its own media company . . . by broadening our array of addressable media to include bloggers . . . to force us to have relationships with a whole new set of influencers who may not be at top magazines but are frequently posting content.

How proficient in terms of the Net should a public relations professional be today?

The PR person who does not read important blogs (for example, in DC you should read *Drudge Report*, *Politico*) is missing the game. You also must be posting comments to blogs that matter. You need to be reading the mainstream media's blogs (for example, Andrew Ross Sorkin's blog at *NY Times—Deal Book*).

What are the primary online communications methods that you recommend to your clients?

Primary online methods are listening to the conversation by reading or viewing video blogs, making comments as appropriate, making relationships with key bloggers. For example, I had lunch the old-fashioned way with Laurel Touby of Mediabistro, who was Tweeting during our lunch about our conversation.

Why do you blog?

I blog because I enjoy writing, because I like to walk the talk about social media, because too few executives in PR agencies are willing to take a stand on issues.

Do you recommend that other CEOs blog internally?

I do recommend that other CEOs blog. I would rather have them make their blog posts accessible to the general public. But internal only is a good first step.

Do you recommend that clients get involved in online forums that are critical of them?

I believe that companies must participate in the horizontal axis of communications. You need to correct misinformation