

Keeping your 'cred' strong on social media

By Richard R. Klicki, Director of Content Development
Friday, November 11, 2014

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.” Warren Buffett uttered his famed quote well before the likes of Facebook and Twitter came onto the scene. But if the Oracle of Omaha were to factor in the impact social media is having on the way customers relate to business, he might revise his quote to “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and one tweet to ruin it.”

How your company is perceived on social media has become as critical — if not more — than how it is perceived in more traditional realms, according to Dale Obrochta, president of UnderstandingYourimage.com in Orland Hills. While many companies still look at social media as a fad — or even a threat — Obrochta points out it has become the next progression in the way business effectively deals with its customers.



“This is basically communication,” he said. “In the past, companies had a letter department. People would write letters to the company, and the company would have someone write a response.”

Letters gave way to the telephone and 800 numbers. Phones became replaced by websites and email. In fact, Obrochta predicts that in the next two to three years, businesses will be using social media the way they currently are using email.

“It is the email of the 21st century,” he said, “and businesses need to understand that.” Because of the way social media works — primarily, groups of people who share similar interests among themselves in virtual ‘communities’ — businesses have a unique opportunity to establish and build reputation and credibility, which can help grow the customer base.

However, Obrochta said, it’s key that the business owner monitor how his company is being perceived on social media to assure the company’s brand and reputation are positive.

Again, he points out, this is a simple progression from more traditional methods.

“Social media is your comment card,” he said. “If you do a search of your company on social media, you can see what people are saying about you, both good and bad.”

Addressing “the bad” directly is essential in maintaining reputation, Obrochta said. If people are complaining about your product or service, but it is an issue that’s affecting your entire industry, you have the opportunity to respond by saying you are not like the others, he said.

But, if the complaint or criticism is about your particular business or product, you need to address the problem. Obrochta recommends you directly contact the person on the social media platform where the complaint is posted. Once there, acknowledge the problem, then give the person a way to address the issue directly with you, either through a phone call or email.

“What you’ve just done then is pulled that hostility off the Internet and drawn it into a phone call,” he said. “It is now in an environment that is one-to-one, instead of one-to-a-million.”

From there, you can work on a solution to the problem. Obrochta stresses you do not have to admit fault or blame, as long as you acknowledge there is a problem.

If the issue is resolved to the customer’s liking, Obrochta notes it can also turn into a positive spin for you.

“The odds are that they are going to go back online and tell everyone you did for them, and now you’ve built that positive PR again,” he said. Above all, he notes, when you see negative comments about your business or products, resist the gut urge to defend yourself.

“As a business, the key thing is to get into these (social media) and listen,” he said. “And you should listen to see what the problem is.” Obrochta highly recommends checking the social media site Yelp, which invites customers to write reviews of businesses they’ve dealt with.

You should also regularly monitor Twitter and Facebook, although Obrochta notes the latter has limitations in that you’re only in contact with those who have ‘liked’ your page.

Doing occasional web searches of your company name can also help you keep an eye on what people are saying. Obrochta stresses that monitoring your company on social media is vital to maintain a relationship between your business and customers. Ignoring social media, he said, is akin to ignoring your customers.

“These are your customers. They are your clients. Why wouldn’t you want to make time for them?” he said. “People get frustrated when a company says they don’t have time to listen to the customer. So the customer says ‘if I can’t reach you, I’ll go on my Facebook page and say your product is lousy.’”

Daily Herald BUSINESS LEDGER

The Business Resource for Suburban Chicago

How a business projects itself in social media is as important to its credibility as how customers portray it. Obrochta says that as more employees use social media for business and personal use, it becomes more important that the company establish rules of engagement to protect its credibility and reputation.

The best way to do that, he said, is to create a social media policy which establishes an etiquette of use, then educate your employees to make sure they understand what can and can't be communicated. "You are not trying to control them, but trying to educate them on how to present information out there," Obrochta said. "You are already doing this with customer service. This brings customer service to social media."

When dealing with social media, whether internal or external, you must always remember that you are talking to a crowd, not one-on-one. How you respond to the crowd is important in order to build credibility among the community, Obrochta said. "We tend to look at Facebook as a one-on-one," he said. "But we forget it's really one-to-many. That's what your employees need to understand."

His suggestion: When posting a comment or responding to someone, imagine there is a 4-year-old child, a priest, or someone you admire in the room with you. Respond the way you would to them. "When you post, you will communicate in a manner that will resonate at that level, and your image will be intact."

