



## The need for planning in a Social Media world

By Anne Sceia Klein

I have given a lot of thought lately to the subject of planning and wonder why so often company executives know about an event—positive or negative—that is going to happen months down the road and make no plans for communications until the 11th hour. Is it eternal optimism that everything will fall into place? Or a lack of understanding of the importance of communications needed to achieve a successful outcome? Or a failure to recognize the time, energy and, most important, creativity required to obtain the best possible visibility (or invisibility) for the event?

Whether it's an anniversary celebration, a new product or service launch, a contract or labor issue, a potential lawsuit, an opportunity or crisis... whatever...decision makers need to give the communications teams an early heads up so they can put appropriate time and thought into how to achieve success. In too many such instances, communicators are the last to be asked for their input.

Communicators have faced these sorts of issues for decades. In some companies, they have been resolved. In others—not.

### Proliferation of social media tools

What brought the subject of planning to the forefront of my thinking was the introduction of the Apple iPad. It's the latest in an increasing proliferation of tools for social media. With the influx of so many new communications technologies giving us myriad ways to reach our audiences, we cannot wait until the last minute to consider communications campaigns. If we want to take advantage of all the opportunities to put our company's or client's best foot forward, we need tremendous foresight...and time to assess how all the media opportunities can fit together.

The new media are immediate and ever present, yet it takes time to develop an effective strategy to use them properly. When speedy, sometimes sloppy communications are launched into this new media climate, companies and their reputations can be made or destroyed in nanoseconds. Creative and insightful communications planners win in this new environment. They see opportunities to develop focused strategies and make the most of those opportunities before them.

When the economy is rough and budgets are tight, we understand the reluctance of committing to a longer lead time for planning. But when there is insufficient time for planning, one or two things can happen: mistakes occur more easily, and everyone must work harder to correct the mistakes. This costs money. Or, we become our own worst enemies by demonstrating we can pull rabbits out of hats. We get tagged as “miracle workers.” One day, we may not be so lucky.

### Pitfalls of last-minute planning

To ensure we as communicators are in the know early on, we have to

step up networking in our own companies or within our own clients. Successful communicators must be connected to the leadership.

We need a seat at the planning table. By being in the loop, we can help avoid the pitfalls of last-minute planning. Planning helps us anticipate what will happen if multiple media outlets—traditional and social—converge on our company. When that happens, we want to maximize the opportunity, not risk failing because we had precious little time to plan a good strategy and develop the tactical elements.

If we are not as connected as we should be, then we have to keep our antennae up for signs of an upcoming event and keep our sixth sense sharp. When we hear rumors that “something” is brewing, we have to be persistent and ask about it. Being kept out of the loop should be a thing of the past—being kept in the loop is now. Social media demand it.

No matter the cause, the equation is simple:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Savvy marketers and communicators} \\ & + \text{sufficient planning time} \\ & = \text{your best shot at a successful outcome} \end{aligned}$$

And so I wonder...if the advertising and public relations people were involved in the Toyota situation months ago, how would they have advised Mr. Toyoda? Would Toyota have been accused of waiting too long to announce its problems? Probably not. A public relations campaign engaging customers via social media could have been leveraged with the advertising campaign, getting ahead of the issue rather than behind it. Think what a difference that would have made.



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