

Hello and welcome to my March 2009 Newsletter

Jeff Ansell News & Views

Everything you're exposed to in media is just someone else's interpretation of issues and events, so view it with an open mind. Skillful communication with media, and in presentations can make all the difference in how your message is reported and received. It's a complicated mix of delivery and interpretation, and an ability few truly master, yet it is something anyone can learn or improve upon.

Topics for this newsletter: SOCIAL MEDIA

- 1.) DO YOU TWEET?
- 2.) LEGAL vs. PUBLIC OPINION
- 3.) HOW TO APOLOGIZE or NOT
- 4.) ROD BLAGOJEVICH - QUOTES
- 5.) TO ME or NOT TO ME
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- 7.) GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT
- 8.) ARE YOU INDEFINABLE or EVASIVE?
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- 10.) THE FACE OF NEWS MEDIA IS CHANGING
- 11.) CUSTOM CRAFTED SOCIAL MEDIA

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to friends and colleagues.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

The world is experiencing rapid changes respective of how we receive, disperse, and interpret news. Our newsletter this month addresses a number of SOCIAL NEWS MEDIA developments.

Average people, who now have easy access to thousands of like-minded people, are transforming traditional news mediums like newspapers and television. Phrases like “citizen journalism” and “crowd sourcing” permeate everyday language.

Just recently the Chicago Tribune filed for bankruptcy, and last week a large Denver newspaper, The Rocky Mountain News closed its doors. It was only a few years ago newspapers claimed the Internet would not have a detrimental impact on their industry, but the reality is that how we receive and interpret news is changing at an exponential rate and it is a direct result of the Internet and social media tools like blogs, newsletters (like this one), and Twitter.

Wikipedia defines social media as “primarily Internet and mobile based tools for sharing and discussing information,” but it is much more. Social media, for many, is becoming a way of life.

The video on this page is heartbreaking . . . but awakening.
<http://tinyurl.com/ccuej5>

1.) DO YOU TWEET?

Some of us don't even blog yet, or use Facebook, and here we are in 2009, and a new technology has once again popped up.

At 140 characters per message, Twitter is the fastest growing news communication tool to hit the streets since, well, blogs. If you don't use Twitter yet, it's likely you soon will.

Twitter is quite literally changing how reporters do business. A few years ago, we were all atwitter about going online with our websites to reach around the world and talk to anyone who would listen. Corporate websites changed the way we communicate with customers, media, and colleagues.

During that period we learned a lot about staying cool and calm, because we knew that sending an inappropriate email was just as dangerous as saying something stupid to a reporter.

The stakes just got higher because Twitter is a news media tool you can't afford to ignore . . . but when you pick it up it's like pointing a loaded gun with a hair trigger at your own head.

Twitter is so fast and it reaches so many people the allure is difficult for a growing number of companies to resist or dismiss.

Twitter almost instantaneously opens up a multi-level conversation with strangers around the world. A diverse group uses it including politicians,

executives, and media. Like most forms of online communication though, it never started out as a commercial application, but it is quickly developing in this direction.

It is also becoming a popular tool to break news. When the Airbus A320 jet ditched into the Hudson River last month, Twitterers were first on the scene and first to report. The same happened with the plane that also recently crashed into the house in upstate NY. Twitter is everywhere. It can be broadcast straight from your cell phone to millions of people around the world in a matter of seconds.

Twitter is an effective communication tool, but it can be dangerous as evidenced in this link <http://tinyurl.com/ckjrdp> of a news reporter's meltdown (caution strong language).

Check out the COMMENTS too.

Hudson River Crash – Who's on First?

<http://tinyurl.com/camf2n>

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2.) LEGAL vs. PUBLIC - OPINION

There is a big difference between communicating with the intent of protecting your legal position, and communicating to protect or enhance your public reputation.

During the trial of four RCMP officers regarding the death of Robert Dziekanski, the Polish immigrant who died at the Vancouver airport after being tasered, one of the officers on the witness stand chose to protect his legal rights and ignored public perception. Who could blame him? In a criminal court it is not what the public feels is right that is important. It is how the law is interpreted.

The officer stated during testimony, "Based on the knowledge we had at the time, we wouldn't have done anything differently."

He was referring to the taser death of Mr. Dziekanski, and although the officer stood firm regarding his actions, it certainly didn't bode well with the public, which was looking for a remorseful apology.

You however, have a choice in how you communicate. You have to be prepared emotionally and intellectually and know how you want to be perceived and what is appropriate in a given circumstance.

Judge for yourself whether the actions of the police could have been different . . . <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrwmSKJPCXU>

RCMP Officer Rundel's testimony as reported by The Toronto Star

<http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/592678>

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3.) HOW TO APOLOGIZE or NOT

Weepy eyes and big sobs no longer work.

Angry stakeholders will not forgive you if your apology isn't genuinely heartfelt, and with substance. Because anyone can now easily go online and talk about YOU, it's harder for a politician or executive to garner sympathy by simply crying crocodile tears.

Social media changed how we apologize. The organizations and companies below, by virtue of the technical format they used, put their companies and personal reputations on the line, which means they are under increased pressure to follow through responsibly.

Websites like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter make it very difficult for companies to dodge accountability. As a result, how you act and apologize in the real world will be impacted by how companies act and apologize in the virtual world.

Here's how President Barack Obama apologizes;
"I've got to own up to my mistake, which is that ultimately it's important for this administration to send a message that there aren't two sets of rules. You know, one for prominent people and one for ordinary folks who have to pay their taxes."
<http://tinyurl.com/cw2vwf>

Bishop Williamson is at the opposite end of the apology spectrum. His apology regarding the outrageous statement he recently made that no Jewish people were killed in the gas chambers during the Holocaust was quickly rejected and harshly criticized. As you will see in the link directly below, not only does he need a lesson in history, but also sensitivity and media training.
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5815675.ece>

Here are a few other examples of apologies;

Napoli Italy
<http://tinyurl.com/axxzso>

Jet Blue Airlines
<http://tinyurl.com/2p8z5e>

Google
<http://tinyurl.com/5s2w3w>

Amazon Web Services
<http://tinyurl.com/6p8yfi>

Twitter
<http://tinyurl.com/58g2pc>

Facebook
<http://tinyurl.com/y3fedz>

MAC iPhone
<http://tinyurl.com/356cum>

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4.) ROD BLAGOJEVICH - QUOTES

Sometimes you just have to zip it, and cut your losses.

Impeached Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich found himself in a world of hurt over the last few months every time he opened his mouth. He was trite and abusive, and instead of working on a strategy to improve his situation, he chose to bully his way through.

Some of his public quotes are now legendary, and that's what I'm addressing here, not the secretly recorded wiretaps by the FBI. Blagojevich was doomed from the outset, but it's worth looking at his public record simply because it demonstrates what not to do.

For example he said; "I want to make money" and it rolled off his tongue like he was ordering vanilla ice cream. In general, honesty is the best policy, but sometimes being too blunt creates an impression that can be leveraged against you. He often used "familiarity" with news media to present himself as an average guy, which was a mistake when you consider media are trained to place their subjects at ease in an effort to get them to loosen up and say things they would normally guard against. When news media spoke with Blagojevich outside his home while he prepared to go jogging, he dodged the scrum and said, "To quote Elvis, 'hang loose.' Now can I get a run in, do you think?"

Blagojevich, as you might have suspected from his hairstyle, is an Elvis fan, which in itself didn't help his cause. If you've seen my video, it's not just what you say, but how you say it and how you present yourself. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9M7oFIJ5E8>

Here's a Google list of "Blagojevich quotes" <http://tinyurl.com/akrvrf>
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5.) TO ME or NOT TO ME

When you're under a microscope the smallest details are seen.

For example, grammarians recently criticized President Barack Obama for using "I" instead of "me."

You probably think you know the correct terminology, but you might have to reconsider. According to the NY Times, the reasoning behind the confusion is based on "hypercorrection." Basically, it seems we are mixing old-time rules with modern day nuance.

President Obama is without question a great speaker, but even he is falling prey to those who regard grammar in an almost religious sense. I have to admit, sometimes I get confused so I go with what sounds right, but apparently how it sounds isn't always correct.

At the end of the day it doesn't really matter to your audience whether you mistakenly used "I" or "me" as long as it doesn't sound awkward, but it will make a big difference in your level of confidence if you stand in front of a

camera or microphone and feel confident that you're at least in the right grammatical ballpark.

Confidence is important, because once again . . .
"It's not just what you say, but how you say it!"

BTW, I know what you're thinking, after listening to George W. Bush for eight years, President Obama sounds like an English professor.

Read more about Obama's "I" vs. "me" mix up.

<http://tinyurl.com/dl3p4g>

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6.) MEDIA MIX – TRADITIONAL or NEW?

For executives, politicians, and spokespeople, one of the most pressing challenges today is how to split interview time effectively between traditional media like newspapers and television, with modern tools like blogs and email or Twitter.

For most, the media message you want to convey is essentially the same, whether it is to assure and calm a distressed public or stockholder, or to simply deliver news about a new process or public service. The challenge is to reach the most people in the most efficient manner, and to know which communication style works best in which medium.

Everything in the last few years has become fractured. Mass media is no longer as "mass" as it used to be. We now have options regarding how we can be interviewed, or how we can deliver a corporate or political message. The recent presidential election is a good example of how important it is to know which news communication tool your followers prefer to use. Managing YouTube effectively was critical, especially for Barack Obama.

Your toolbox is growing more complex and includes newspapers, radio, and television, plus social media options like websites, blogs, email, Twitter, Facebook, and more. The common denominator is the need for information and the need to get it fast, because news happens whether you are ready or not.

Many traditional journalists now have blogs, and their blogs are updated 24/7. Thorough fact checking is becoming a thing of the past. In fact, every day we hear of newsrooms cutting staff, and quite often it is support staff that falls first. Most major news companies update the news minute by minute on their homepages, which means when they call, you have to be relatively responsive by learning what they need and getting back to them ASAP. If you don't, the common reply in their story is, "the subject didn't respond to our request for information," which makes you look evasive.

In one sense, we have more opportunity to tell our version of the story at our own pace on our own political or company websites, but always keep in mind the public still checks into the major news agency websites to start their initial quest for information. Most people go to at least three different sources, the first being a major news company, and the last your web presence, be it a blog, website or Twitter. More and more journalists will even email subjects and ask them to email an answer back.

Many thought it would be easier and pressure would be reduced because you could use your company's website to disburse information on your schedule, and you're partially right, but the reality is that when a journalist calls, you have to be prepared.

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JEFF'S CALENDAR UPDATE advertisement

DEALING WITH AN ANGRY PUBLIC – HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

The next Dealing With An Angry Public Harvard Law School conference is slated for April 30 – May 1, 2009. The conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts provides strategies for resolving conflicts and disputes with dissatisfied customers, potential litigants and concerned interest groups.

As a faculty member of the Public Disputes Program, part of my agenda explores how to get messages out effectively when dealing with the media and interest groups in controversial situations.

Hope to see you there . . . click here for more info;
<http://www.jeffansell.com/dealing-with-an-angry-public.html>

Direct link to Harvard Law School program description
<http://pon.execseminars.com/index.php?seminar=ap&do=learn>

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7.) GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT

Speaking of fact checking, FactCheck.org is an interesting site, and to quote them they are a "nonpartisan, nonprofit "consumer advocate" for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics."

I mentioned the site in my last newsletter and thought you'd be interested again to see what happens when they turn the spotlight on President Barack Obama.

According to FC, President Obama's first speech to a joint session of Congress was a little off the mark regarding accuracy. FC reported that Obama stated oil imports were higher today than in the past, but according to FC, imports peaked in 2005 and are lower today.

Read more about what Fact Check thinks of Obama's accuracy
<http://tinyurl.com/dxdvt6>

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8.) ARE YOU INDEFINABLE or EVASIVE?

Can you learn to be artfully evasive? Ask your kids!

My recommendation is to always be as responsive as you can – as long as you

remain in control of every word that leaves your lips.

In the recent presidential race, we saw considerable evasive action. Shankar Vedantam of the Washington Post wrote an article entitled, "Artful Dodging Trumps Open Evasion, Studies Show."

In it he referred to Sarah Palin's evasive style, in contrast to the "artful dodging" of Barack Obama, who stayed on topic.

You can learn more here . . .

<http://tinyurl.com/6qzhvr>

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9.) HOW TO MANAGE A SOCIAL MEDIA MELTDOWN

The best way to avoid a social media catastrophe is to learn the lingo and stay alert. It's always better to prevent a meltdown than to clean up after one.

Companies often avoid learning about new communication tools by hoping they will go away, or at the very least not develop into anything serious. It's a "head in the sand" strategy.

Many companies also don't realize social media is a double edge sword. Your competitors can now not only tip off media, but also covertly place damaging info about you and your company online.

If you do find yourself in a sticky social media position, here are a few tips that will give you a bit of breathing space;

Be upfront and tell the truth. The more you try to hide information, the deeper everyone will dig.

It is of paramount importance that you admit your mistake and then immediately relate how you are going to fix it. Anything less is disingenuous and perfect fodder for a social media attack.

You have to convince people you are listening and are considering the issues and situation seriously. Social media allows everyone to peer into every corner and read between the lines. Trained journalists usually have some sense of decorum, and they won't unnecessarily make trouble where none exists, but quite often today citizen journalists do not see it the same way. Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it's impossible to put it back.

It is also important to let everyone know you will learn from your mistake and do everything in your power to not let it happen again. Saying it is one thing, but today lip service is so common the public has become jaded, so if you really want to connect and manage the issue more responsibly tell people exactly what you are doing to rectify the situation, and follow up.

And finally, the most important thing you can do to prevent a social media meltdown - stay connected.

Social Media, Rumors, and Defamation

<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/SMC/46787>

ABC News
<http://tinyurl.com/cutlnf>

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10.) THE FACE OF NEWS MEDIA IS CHANGING

Every day innovative people develop new ways to report and deliver the news. Cell phones play a major role. In January, San Francisco police shot a handcuffed man to death in a subway station. A young woman captured the incident and placed it on YouTube for everyone to witness. Her video also showed the reaction of the crowd.

Citizen journalists then followed up and interviewed the shocked young woman who gave the public a view rarely seen. The video has already received 288,371 views, has 6 video responses, and 2,088 comments. The shooting and reporting stimulated wide debate across North America and changed again how we view the news.

Watch for yourself. The video is jerky and at first confusing, but stick with it and you'll see news history in the making.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_K0PISpxx4

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11.) CUSTOM CRAFTED SOCIAL MEDIA

A small social media company in California is making great strides in how journalists are paid to report the news. David Cohn recently won a grant of \$340,000 from the Knight Foundation to launch his news media company, Spot.Us.

Basically, independent journalists and readers suggest ideas for investigative journalism, and the best ideas are backed and funded by donors, average citizens, who contribute "micro-payments."

The idea has been embraced by journalists and readers and demonstrates there is room for innovation even at a time when the walls seem to be crumbling around us.

Spot.Us
<http://www.spot.us/>

Knight Foundation
<http://tinyurl.com/cvc6p6>

That's it for this edition of News & Views.

I hope you found it informative and valuable.

Sincerely,
Jeff Ansell

Be well and Thank You !!

DON'T FORGET TO PRINT THIS NEWSLETTER.
Read it on your commute or at home.

Check into my site for updates between Newsletters.
<http://www.jeffansell.com/>

I'm always interested in your comments and viewpoints.

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