Reputation Risk Management & Social Media – The Need for Clear Policy

My Android is probably more powerful than the first PC I bought; I can send and receive e-mails, access websites, update my blog and stay in constant communication with like-minded communities by means of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the rest.

Not only can I stay in touch with others but others can stay in touch with me; and even people I don't know can look in to see how I'm getting on or what I'm thinking – from almost anywhere on the globe.

And, in today's impatient and (pretty much) uncensored mobile societies people are more ready than ever before to share experiences with others; experiences that can be positive or negative which uplift or run down a brand or organisation, or simply act as a channel for the exhibitionist.

So, what has this to do with risk?

In the main, people tend to share negative experiences more readily than they do positive ones; so if the organisation (commercial, not for profit, social, governmental etc.) has upset an individual, they may lash out through social media before pausing to consider the consequences – and undermine the organisation's credibility and public standing as a result.

There are a number of instances where people have videoed themselves misbehaving on company property – putting things into customers' food for example. Such activities, if posted, can readily 'go viral' to demonstrate [inadvertently] to the world that the standards in the organisation are well below what might be expected and as a consequence undermine credibility and, for the bigger companies, market capitalisation.

Risk Management

Social media as a source of risk cannot be closely managed due to its uncensored nature and the impossibility of an organisation controlling personal time. Such is the apparent difficulty that less than half of UK businesses have any sort of social media policy in place to raise awareness of the consequences of mobile communications being used thoughtlessly. (Survey by TopLine Communications polling Marketing Directors on LinkedIn)

Each organisation (whether profit, non-profit or not for profit) needs to provide every person involved in the organisation with a policy document that defines (with a lexicon) the expectations of the organisation with regard to personal social media content – whether posted within the premises or whether referenced externally.

Developing a Social Media Policy

In this unregulated yet convergent market, there is benefit to be had by employing an external specialist to guide and support the development of a Social Media Policy. The main points are:
- To clearly define the roles of the board members in drawing up the policy
- To be clear and unambiguous about how to treat non-compliance
- To assign the tasks appropriately and draft the policy
- To identify the changes that will be needed to bring about compliance
- To develop a programme to implement the changes
- To specify the communications plan
- To open feedback and review loops to check, measure and amend the policy as mobile usage evolves
- To include the policy in the organisation's documentation, induction and reviews
- To keep the policy updated and people aware of changes and developments

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