Webb's Web

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Corporate communication – and how not to do it

ICANN – the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers – has a knack for getting people offside, so you'd think that they'd handle their communications deftly. You see, they have a habit (much to be applauded) of going all over the place and having their meetings in various cities – often in the developing world. Well a couple of months ago, the meeting was in Senegal and it seems that the standard of one of the hotels was not very good – even after an advance party had put the hotel management on alert. Many of the meeting attendees had objected to rats and filth and lack of working facilities, so ICANN's head of communications wrote to various Senegalese officials complaining about it. And, as they do with official communication, ICANN posted the letter on their website – and then quickly took it down, but not so quickly that alert readers didn't have time to take a copy. Red faces ensued. I wonder when people will realise that it's very hard to keep secrets like that. There's a lot being written about how to handle communication with your stakeholders in web 2.0; it looks like web 1.0 has just as many traps.

Let's remain real careful out there

Regular readers will have appreciated that although I'm sometimes critical of services and institutions in my posts, I do try to temper my words to ensure that they're not (too) offensive. So it was that I took notice of an article at **mashable. com/2011/12/07/blogger-vs-journalist** reporting that a blogger was liable for a fine of $2.5m – because she could not claim the sort of defence that's available

to journalists. Many places would protect bloggers from this sort of penalty, but quite a few don't. As we know that blogs can be read anywhere, there's plenty of scope for jurisdiction shopping – particularly Australia, where it seems that plaintiffs can get more favourable treatment than in some other countries.

Becoming comfortable with social media

Attitudes to social media are changing – despite a few posts that I've seen recently. One optimist wished that it would all go away; one other requested that it be banned. (Lots of luck with that crusade, folks.) What more people are working on is how to manage it, and that's where the hope lies. The policies that you'll see coming out of many organisations seem overly complicated, and it does make you wish for something simple like, "Don't be an idiot. Use your judgement". Unfortunately, the newspapers show us every day that people tend not to use their judgement in the workplace. This was reinforced a while ago when I read a tweet that said, "We trust our staff to talk on the phone, why not trust them to talk on Facebook". Now, it's not absolutely clear what they mean. If you're talking about the staff speaking irresponsibly on behalf of the organisation, you need to acknowledge that the phone and the internet are two completely different modes of communication. You wouldn't trust your staff to speak on talkback radio as a representative of your company, so clearly some ground rules must be set.

If, on the other hand, the discussion is about allowing staff access to social media in the workplace and whether they might abuse the privilege, then it's a fair question. The problem is really one of perception. A passerby seeing someone talking

on the phone is not going to get too upset, but to look over the shoulder of a staffer browsing a Facebook page – well, it doesn't look very much like work, does it?

Another great feat of clay

In a post on Clay Shirky's blog at **www.shirky.com/weblog/2012/01/newspapers-paywalls-and-core-users** he's done some further analysis on the economics of newspapers and pay walls, and still doesn't think they'll work in the long run. I particularly liked the NPR analogy, "where sponsors reach all listeners, but direct support only comes from donors." Neat.

Trim those comments

I read a story on a site that talks about tips to make your website more credible, and then I scrolled down to see the comments. What did I find? A lot of spam. I speak from daily experience when I say that there are a lot of people spamming blogs. To my mind, not cleaning up the spam in the comments you receive removes much of your site's credibility. Come on, it's not hard!

What SOPA means to lots of people

The year started with many big websites blacking out because of objections to the SOPA and PIPA bills making their way through the US House and Senate. I'm not optimistic that the anti-piracy forces will either refine their ridiculous estimates of losses through piracy or even give up the fight. They're in it for the long haul – and so should be those of us who fear the collateral damage of over-zealous legislation. If you want to get a better idea of why there's a lot of opposition to the bills, the article by Chris Heald, *Why SOPA is Dangerous* (**mashable. com/2012/01/17/sopa-dangerous-opinion**) is a good place to start.

👤 **Posted by Kerry Webb**