

Stephanie Schwartz

The posts I wrote for Coyne PR's blog, CoynExchange, are pasted below with their original links because they may be hard to find or unavailable since I am no longer an employee. They are arranged from most recent to least.

CoynExchange blog entries

<http://coynepr.squarespace.com/coynexchange/2009/2/6/web-posting-assessment-aka-how-to-react-to-a-blog-posting.html>

Friday

Feb062009

"Web Posting Assessment" aka How to React to a Blog Posting

Friday, February 6, 2009 at 04:34PM

The Air Force has quite a presence in the social media world--and has figured out an easy way, shown in the graph below, of how to engage bloggers when they talk about them. From globalnerdy.com (hat tip to Derek, who got it from casesblog.blogspot.com). Although Coyne generally follows these guidelines, this is a good chart to compare with our own efforts. Being the Air Force, it's got quite the military title.

AIR FORCE WEB POSTING RESPONSE ASSESSMENT V.2
 AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY - EMERGING TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

DISCOVERY

WEB POSTING
 Has someone discovered a post about the organization?
 Is it positive or balanced?

CONTACT INFORMATION
 Phone: 703-696-1158
 E-mail: afbluetube@gmail.com

EVALUATE

CONCURRENCE
 A factual and well cited response, which may agree or disagree with the post, yet is not factually erroneous, a rant or rage, bashing or negative in nature.
 You can concur with the post, let stand or provide a positive review. Do you want to respond?

"TROLLS"
 Is this a site dedicated to bashing and degrading others?

MONITOR ONLY
 Avoid responding to specific posts, monitor the site for relevant information and comments. Notify HQ.

"RAGER"
 Is the posting a rant, rage, joke or satirical in nature?

"MISGUIDED"
 Are there erroneous facts in the posting?

FIX THE FACTS
 Do you wish to respond with factual information directly on the comment board?
 (See *Response Considerations*)

LET STAND
 Let the post stand -- no response.

"UNHAPPY CUSTOMER"
 Is the posting a result of a negative experience?

RESTORATION
 Do you wish to rectify the situation and act upon a reasonable solution?
 (See *Response Considerations*)

RESPOND

SHARE SUCCESS
 Do you wish to proactively share your story and your mission?
 (See *Response Considerations*)

FINAL EVALUATION
 Write response for current circumstances only. Will you respond?

RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

TRANSPARENCY
 Disclose your Air Force connection.

SOURCING
 Cite your sources by including hyperlinks, video, images or other references.

TIMELINESS
 Take time to create good responses. Don't rush.

STONE
 Respond in a tone that reflects highly on the rich heritage of the Air Force.

INFLUENCE
 Focus on the most used sites related to the Air Force.

YES

NO

NO

YES

NO

YES

NO

YES

NO

YES

NO

YES

YES

YES

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Giveaway Mania

Tuesday, November 4, 2008 at 01:58PM

Freebies sure are popular these days.

Today's Election Day, and if there wasn't incentive enough to vote, several companies are giving away stuff in order to make the expected long lines worth it. USA Today published an [article](#) on the topic, but [there are several sites](#) that list all the places that are giving out products. Most are food-related (Starbucks, Ben & Jerry's, Chick-Fil-A, Krispy Kreme), but you can even get a flu vaccination.

Ice cream joints and Starbucks have promotional days often, meant to entice new customers to the store and hope they'll purchase something in conjunction with the item or come back. This has never worked for me, since I'm not the type that's gonna go out and buy coffee and ice cream often. Most of these campaigns are spread word-of-mouth, often assisted from [viral videos](#), ads on Facebook and the occasional *New York Times* placement. They generate great buzz (see Kevin's [entry](#) below), but do these promotions directly translate to sales?

The funniest part of the whole "Giveaway-It's Election Day!" mentality is that it's actually [against federal law](#) to provide monetary incentives to get people to vote. Whoops! So now you don't even need to vote to pick up a free cup of coffee.

It's a good thing I don't need to show proof, since my polling place doesn't have stickers...

Note: Most of the stores listed don't have locations anywhere nearby...boo.

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Wednesday

Jul162008

Too little too late?

Wednesday, July 16, 2008 at 03:28PM

The *Los Angeles Times*' Top of the Ticket blog has an interesting [comment](#) on Obama's response to the *New Yorker* cartoon supposedly satirizing his image, saying that while he had the right impulse to decline commenting on it because he thought it was trivial, that message didn't come across until he said it on a Larry King Live [interview](#) two days after the story hit. By then, spokespeople for both the McCain and Obama campaigns had released statements denouncing the magazine cover, which featured no caption but an article focusing on Obama's early political career in Chicago. The blog points out this late response as a major PR gaffe, because it drove press to the cartoon instead of dampening the story:

If the cover is so tasteless and offensive, why purposely call it to the attention of millions of Americans with a strong denunciation on an otherwise slow news Sunday afternoon? It turned a mere magazine cover that the Obama campaign would rather no one see into a must-see for millions. Say, the magazine prints a million copies. A million covers. But there are [nearly 305 million Americans](#).

But as a result of the campaign-induced uproar, that image has now been reproduced and received countless millions more voter impressions than the magazine itself could ever dream of. It's been viewed hundreds of thousands of times already just on this blog. And, by the way, what was the Obama campaign doing calling the magazine, trying to get an apology, or intimidate someone?

[...]

*Ignoring the magazine would have been ideal. But if that's not possible, what if [Bill] Burton [his communications director] had made himself available -- that's not hard to do with reporters circling like hawks -- waited for the inevitable *New Yorker* question and said something like, "C'mon, guys. It's a magazine cover, for Pete's sake. A cartoon. They think it's satire. It's a free country. It's sure not funny. We think there are far more important issues to put on the cover of a magazine, like the looming mortgage crisis that the Bush administration and its McCain cronies have ignored so long."*

[...]

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Without an explosive response, that magazine cover story would have been a minor one-day story in far fewer places than it was. In fact, even assuming the McCain camp's denunciation was genuine, both campaigns joining in added more gasoline to the fire, which to be honest doesn't exactly hurt McCain's cause. It sure got all the chatter off the Phil Gramm whiner stuff quickly, an Obama gift to the GOP.

Would that really have worked? Controversial political stories and provocative magazine covers have a way of grabbing attention and sticking around for a bit. It's interesting to note that while Obama didn't want to release his statement his advisors felt someone had to, and ended up releasing a statement that didn't exactly jibe with the message the candidate wanted to send. But even if Obama had ignored the cover, this is a story that bloggers would pick up and it would slowly burn its way to the mainstream media. How does one deal with a situation when responding would only bring negative attention? Many times the absence of a comment is seen as damning, even if the story is more complicated than that, and a long explanation would only make it worse. I don't think this is as big a gaffe as the blog makes it out to be, but his response time and style is something to watch, especially when added to what may look to be delayed responses to the Jeremiah Wright fiasco and those [persistant internet rumors](#).

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PR Press

Tuesday, July 15, 2008 at 04:34PM

The *New York Times* recently published three fascinating articles, all dealing with different aspects of public relations.

The first, "[Need Press? Repeat: 'Green,' 'Sex,' 'Cancer,' 'Secret,' 'Fat,'](#)" practically blows up PR secrets by showcasing which words are likely to receive pickup. Most people who follow the news today know that anything green is hot (so much so that there is [information overload](#)), and sex and health are pretty much standbys, but those popular adjectives of "better, faster, stronger" (like the Kanye West [song](#)) are also

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golden, provided the information is true. The idea is to strike a balance so that the information is newsworthy but not hyperbole, not dull and businesslike but easy to understand. It's also funny to note that the celebrity world revolves around "baby," "breakup," "marriage," and "divorce"; the particular names filling in the sentence make it fun.

This isn't a story the *Times* would traditionally run, tucking it away on a Tuesday. The case study the article opens with, on toxic shower curtains, was not only picked up by ABCNews and a host of other outlets, but the PR machine became the story. "Toxic shower curtains" had legs because it tied something commonplace with a fear—always a sure bet when it comes to getting attention. That's why terrorists hit shopping malls and subways; they are places everyone goes, and they are part of routines.

Speaking of routines, Sunday's paper gave us "[Warning: Habits May Be Good for You](#)", which quickly shot up to be one of the *Times*' most e-mailed articles. It discusses the marriage of public health campaigns and industry, combining sophisticated marketing techniques with social causes. One reason new products succeed is because they become ingrained as habits, as a necessity. The bottle water revolution is one of them. Certain cues trigger a craving, which is why beer commercials nowadays feature groups of friends and candy bars are marketed as a pick-me-up, not as a special treat. Cravings, when tied to habits, are often thought of as bad, like in terms of smoking, but now the same science is working towards connecting positive ideas and cues with beneficial products.

Doing PR for good causes isn't new, but it's something that's been gaining traction as corporations have begun to see how their reputation is affected by how they act with the rest of the world, not just in their corporate bubble. Fox News is a lesson in negative PR. They now have quite a reputation, not just for being right-leaning (to put it mildly), but also for being a bully. Fox News' slogan of "Fair and Balanced" and "We Report. You Decide" is widely mocked, and Stephen Colbert's whole show is based upon an exaggeration of their philosophy. David Carr's July 7 [column](#) talks of smear campaigns taken on by the network's PR machine, all because they are so afraid of being viewed negatively (ha!) that they go all militantly defensive. But even excusing the media and liberals' own issues with Fox News, their aggressive tactics have backfired, causing many of their accomplishments to be underreported, therefore denying them the legitimacy they seek. Quite a catch-22. Politically, their hard-line approach to topics have made them winners in the ratings race for a long time, but by acting the same way with the media, as if they are always the losers, it has effectively killed positive coverage of their organization. Engaging other reporters and trying to set the story straight—as accurately and fairly as possible—is key, not bludgeoning a narrow agenda to death.

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Brian Lewis, the head of the public relations department at Fox News, points out that with the media being an all-encompassing vehicle now, with blogs and 24-hour coverage, it is necessary to be engaged and active. True, but that does not mean tampering or trying to stranglehold negative coverage, because that is only going to mar a company's reputation; it means working to damper the bad news while acknowledging the criticisms that fueled the story in the first place. While Fox News maintains that it is its politics that separate them from the competition, it is also their tactics, and sometimes they mix the two of them up--a line that should always be demarcated.

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Tuesday

Oct282008

Media Bias: Reflecting Reality?

Tuesday, October 28, 2008 at 04:09PM

To continue on Tim Schramm's [post](#) a few days ago:

Media bias is something everyone in the media gets accused of. It's inevitable; someone doesn't like your story, they'll cry bias. Sometimes it's hard to strike a purely objective tone and sometimes reality doesn't play that way. If the article is about why everyone loves a popular product and how successful the product is, of course the article is going to be laudatory.

Presidential elections are continuously monitored for bias in coverage. Every week there's another poll comparing coverage--newspapers, broadcast networks, cable, talking heads and late-night comedies--but for many people, it's what's perceived that's the ticket.

Clark Hoyt, the *New York Times* public editor, wrote about this in last week's excellent [column](#):

Nobody acknowledges the possibility that, because of their own biases, they could be reading more, or less, than was intended into an article, a headline or a picture. Many go a step beyond alleging mere

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bias to accuse The Times of operating from a conscious agenda to help one candidate and destroy the other.

[...]

Bias is a tricky thing. None of us are objective. We like news that supports our views and dislike what may challenge them. We tend to pick apart each article, word by word, failing to remember that it is part of a river of information from which facts can be plucked to support many points of view. Perversely, we magnify what displeases us and minimize what we like.

Every two weeks, he discusses implications of biases and impropriety within *Times* coverage. He, obviously, has focused particularly on the election. He notes that, "Being human, journalists do have personal biases", but most of that comes through the nature of the medium: "Journalists are biased toward conflict, toward bad news because it is more exciting than good news, and, obviously, toward what is new." Politico elaborated on this in a report entitled, "[Why McCain is getting hosed in the press](#)":

The main reason is that for most journalists, professional obligations trump personal preferences. Most political reporters (investigative journalists tend to have a different psychological makeup) are temperamentally inclined to see multiple sides of a story, and being detached from their own opinions comes relatively easy.

Reporters obsess about personalities and process, about whose staff are jerks or whether they seem like decent folks, about who has a great stump speech or is funnier in person than they come off in public, about whether Michigan is in play or off the table. This is the flip side of the fact of how much we care about the horse race- we don't care that much about our own opinions of which candidate would do more for world peace or tax cuts.

[...]

The strongest of these is the bias in favor of momentum. A candidate who is perceived to be doing well tends to get even more positive coverage (about his or her big crowds or the latest favorable polls or whatever). And a candidate who is perceived to be doing poorly tends to have all events viewed through this prism.

But what brought me here to post about this was this excerpt from the article, highlighted on [The Daily Dish](#):

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There have been moments in the general election when the one-sidedness of our site - when nearly every story was some variation on how poorly McCain was doing or how well Barack Obama was faring - has made us cringe. As it happens, McCain's campaign is going quite poorly and Obama's is going well. Imposing artificial balance on this reality would be a bias of its own.

If the media is supposed to reflect reality, then sometimes it has to lean in one direction. It just might not be what people want to hear.

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<http://coynepr.squarespace.com/coynexchange/2008/10/28/media-bias-reflecting-reality.html>
