

Increased Complexities Require a Rapid-fire Component

Social media technologies have dramatically increased the speed of everything be it good, bad or neutral. Change no longer cranks along at a snail's pace but rather moves on a millisecond scale over the internet.

It is the speed and scale of change that is causing chaos within the business community. And it requires significant immediate attention paid to it – if a business is to remain competitive and sustainable. It's not just the shot that's heard around the world, it is also the embellishments and mistruths that travel in a millisecond around the world and often leave the truth far behind.

Organizations and individuals can reach across international borders, time zones and cultures instantly with the click of a button, directly reaching millions of potential customers. Or they can communicate internally with their global business community and network of connections with the same click. This concept is transformational when fully integrated into the business culture.

While there are opportunities for growth and profit, there are challenges and risks involved, too. According to the McKinsey Global Institute study from July 2012, "The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies,": "giving social interactions Internet scale, speed and economics carries risks. They include identity theft, loss of intellectual property, violation of privacy, abuse, damage to reputations and upending of traditional business models."

Paralysis of Analysis

In years past, businesses would analyze and agonize over how to respond to negative press, the malfunction of a product or mounting lawsuits for negligence or misrepresentation.

No longer is there time for paralysis analysis. The speed of social technologies requires an almost instant response to the issue at hand - one that is appropriately hard hitting with an accuracy rate of at least 90 percent. A business can no longer afford to take a "wait and see" approach to see if bad news will blow over or get covered up in the next news cycle or newest fad to hit the marketplace. Prompt, if not urgent, action is required.

The Rapid-fire Answer

During times of calm develop a deliberate, decisive highly effective emergency action plan that is adaptive, reasonably foolproof, flexible and immediately launch-able. The plan should be designed with efficiency and effectiveness as top priorities.

Build a Rapid-Fire Team. Do it today. Depending on the size of your business, you may want to build two Rapid-Fire Teams (RFT): one to deal with external assaults and one for internal operations.

If your company is a small organization the team may consist of your chief financial person, a tech savvy person and you. For large organizations the team for external issues should always consist of someone who reports directly to the CEO and who always controls the meeting, a top financial person, a social media specialist, a public relations specialist and key department heads. If the problem is internal or an external issue will also have internal ramifications, a human resources person should be added and any additional managers that have a direct connection to employees.

Their charge is to develop rapid-fire solutions to developing negative external events and threats that could harm or even paralyze your company – preferably before an incident happens. It should also be decided in advance who would be the best public spokesperson for specific issues. The CEO is not necessarily the best or right person to speak on behalf of the company. Only the spokesperson, who is camera- and sound bite savvy, should speak for the organization.

A good example of what not to do is the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The first broadcast visual, a picture of an oil covered pelican fighting to stay alive, set the tone for the magnitude of the disaster. Two years later BP is still trying to recover. Be prepared and choose your team *before* a crisis occurs.

Create a Situation Room. Set aside specific space for the team to meet to eliminate confusion and save time. The location of the room or space needs only to be easily and quickly accessible to the team and more importantly, absolutely private and discreet. This room needs to insulate and protect the RFT from the outside so they can think clearly, develop a surefire response plan, evaluate and anticipate all contingency options and deliver an effective reasonably fool-proof response. A response that protects your valuable name, investments, products and reputation while shielding you from exploding negative embellishments over the Internet of the issue you are facing. For absent team members, phone conferencing will work as long as that person is in a private location and on a secure phone line.

Create a code system for the two teams – perhaps code red for external assaults and code green for internal issues. In many cases there will be crossover for the teams so together they deal with both internal and external debilitating events simultaneously.

Drill, drill and drill some more. Drill down to all the facts that need to be dealt with and then do run-throughs of the response, before an incident happens. Your team should have at its fingertips a number of strategies that have been well-practiced to fit various situations that might erupt. Be prepared in advance. You want to deliver the right message that is trustworthy and increases your chances for coming out on top.

The rapid-fire component is an added strategy for dealing with social technological changes that have encroached on traditional business operations. Prevent the next disaster from destroying your business by establishing your rapid-fire team today.

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Pat Heydlauff speaks from experience. She creates environments that engage and focus your workforce. She is the author of the forthcoming book, Engage, Unleash the Power of Focus and published books, Feng Shui, So Easy a Child Can Do It and Selling Your Home with a Competitive Edge, and can be reached at 561-799-3443 or www.engagetolead.com.