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Five Steps for Social Media Success

Interactive Springboard Provides Solutions to Combat Uncertainty about Social Media ROI among Tennessee Communicators and Organizations

Knoxville, Tenn. — With more than half of Tennessee communicators expressing uncertainty in a recent survey about how social media offers return on investment, Interactive Springboard provided five steps to help organizations manage and measure social media for business results.

First, understand and develop the organization's core purposes for using social media.

"It's a mistake to dive into using social media tools simply because competitors are using them and without a specific strategy of your own," said Mary Beth West, a public relations consultant and partner in Interactive Springboard. "Social media are driven by communicating and building relationships in an independent, self-directed way, so it's important to manage these tools with your own focus – not a 'me-too' mentality."

Next, research the organization's audiences and know their expectations related to social media engagement.

"A social media program won't be successful if it misses the mark in form or function with target audiences," said Tori Rose, creative director of Blue Media Boutique and a partner in Interactive Springboard. "Different audiences want and expect different things from a company's online presence, so it's important to research what those expectations are and how they are changing over time as technologies quickly progress."

Third, integrate research insights with the organization's social media focus in order to develop a plan. Do not fail to balance ambitious goals with the organization's actual resources to implement the program well, including tasks like monitoring online comments daily, generating useful messages and content, responding to posts and other critical activities.

In addition, make sure the social media plan integrates well with all other communications efforts and messages within the company or organization.

"You don't want to have a social media identity out there that runs completely counter to the culture of your organization or contradicts your brand reputation," West said.

Fourth, implement the plan consistently over time, keeping in mind that social media lend themselves to live, spur-of-the-moment interactions. Be authentic and transparent in what the messages are and how they are communicated.

“For example, if a customer posts a message saying they’ve had trouble with your product, post a response immediately that apologizes for the problem and makes clear that you want to pursue a quick and effective resolution to the issue,” Rose said.

“You need to be sure you don’t sound scripted or robotic in how you communicate – after all, you’re on a ‘live’ virtual stage, and the camera is rolling,” Rose said. “Speak with the voice of a real person, even if that means acknowledging a possible problem. People appreciate honesty.”

Finally, track results and evaluate progress on a regular basis. Measure the numbers as well as the qualitative feedback to see how social media has helped the organization forge new, better relationships for sales support and other outcomes.

Bear in mind that the initial investment of a social media start-up phase may exceed documented returns, but that over time, the numbers can level out once a system is place.

“Fifty-two percent of Tennessee communicators in our recent survey said they’re unsure how social media can contribute to the bottom line,” West said. “Much of that uncertainty can be overcome by taking a methodical approach to social media management.”

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About the Survey Methodology

This census survey of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members from across the state of Tennessee was conducted online from June 16 to Aug. 6, 2010. Members from the following chapters participated in the study: Nashville, Knoxville/Volunteer, Chattanooga/Lookout, Memphis and the Tri-Cities. In addition to the core questions highlighted in this release, each chapter had the option of appending proprietary questions of specific interest to the local membership. The survey achieved an overall response rate of 24 percent and provides unique insight into the opinions of those whose day-to-day responsibilities include managing all manner of media, including social media.

About Interactive Springboard

Interactive Springboard is a joint venture between women-owned firms Blue Media Boutique, LLC and Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC, providing an integrated, research-based approach to social media, supporting client communications and business objectives. www.interactivespringboard.com

About Blue Media Boutique, LLC

Based in Knoxville, Tenn., Blue Media Boutique provides creative, technology and marketing services, including design, development, animation, video, illustration, branding, print, e-commerce, database, CMS, search optimization, copywriting, promotions, events and campaigns. www.bluemediaboutique.com

About Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC

Based in Maryville, Tenn., Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC advances clients’ communications, relationships and reputations to meet business and organizational objectives. The firm’s services include research strategy, integrated marketing communications campaigns; media, community and employee relations programs; interactive media strategy and program management; crisis preparedness; and special events. www.marybethwest.com