

Public Affairs Goes Digital

How New Media Can Change Your Business

Conversations about your business and/or complex issues are taking place online; these conversations take place with or without you. The public has more control over your reputation than ever before and public opinion is accessible to anyone, at anytime, on the Internet. This information can quickly build a case for or against your company before you've had time to respond. Often information can be based on opinion rather than fact. Opinions posted online never go away; indelible statements are available, forever. These communications trends have created a need for companies to re-examine the way business is conducted; enter the digitization of public affairs.

Think about how you find information, Google, right? Increasingly, decision-makers are using the latest technology to obtain and communicate information. Today, 33% of the country's Senators and Representatives are now using Twitter. President Obama has a Linked-In page. New media technologies can expand your reach and influence beyond all previous borders.

Your website is the single, most important information source about your company. Think of your website as a 24/7 staff, protecting your credibility and delivering accurate information that is frequently updated and always accessible. In the past, businesses were dependent on a few tools (newspapers, TV, radio) to communicate their business messages to the public. Realistically, that limited communications opportunities to one day newspaper coverage, or a one-minute news segment. Now, you can ensure that your tailored messages are always accessible to valued audiences.

Just having a website, however is not enough. It's what you do with your website and how your company uses the new tools that are available online. Companies can build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders using new media techniques. Digitizing your public affairs efforts help your business ensure the messages you want to communicate are found online, and then allows you to engage the decision-makers, constituents, clients and industry leaders who are now looking for your information online.

Why not build your case before a negative press piece comes out, drastically reducing negative impacts? You can create a community of supporters before they are needed. You can move your website up the Google search page. You can twitter your employees, or ask them to be creative and twitter to the wider community.

So how do you figure it all out? Things change by the day. Today it's Twitter, tomorrow it's something else. The tools and vocabulary of communications have changed and will continue to transform. The playing field has been leveled but most companies are slow to realize the benefits of online communications. Gone are the days of being on the defense – now is the time to be pro-active - position your business, cultivate your advocates, and blunt negative news coverage. As James Carville so articulately summarized in the 1992 Presidential campaign ... "It's the economy, stupid." Today, it's the internet.

Pamela McDermott is President and Founder of McDermott Ventures. Since the company's inception in 1997, McDermott Ventures has represented clients in the areas of public affairs, real estate consulting and strategic communications. In 2008, McDermott Ventures launched a specialty practice, focused on digital media and its applications for the business sector.