



Business-to-business marketing strategies from the award-winning Ad Hoc Communication Resources team.

Protecting your Business from Internet Rumors

AVOID COMMUNICATION CRISES AND IMPROVE YOUR PUBLIC POSITIONING

▶ The Ad Hoc team can help you avoid communications crises and improve your public positioning by conducting a comprehensive assessment of your corporate communications. Call Ad Hoc today at 402.572.6510 or visit us on the web at www.AdHocCR.com



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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What kinds of rumors about your company's business practices and plans are circulating on the Internet? With tens of thousands of messages posted in online forums each day, your customers, shareholders, employees, and other key publics may be reading some wild fictions about your firm.

In fact, 73 percent of public companies now report that they have been the subject of web-based chats or message board discussions. What's more, 34 percent of public companies report that independent industry analysts have asked them about information and rumors contained in chat room and message board threads!*

What's your problem?

From a corporate communications perspective, squashing rumors spread through informal online forums is tricky. The identity of those writing messages is usually hidden. Plus, there are no editors or publishers checking content accuracy — anyone can, on impulse, post any bizarre rumor or unfair accusation they like, with complete anonymity.

Small-time grippers

In the case of a single or few offensive posts in an obscure forum, resist the temptation to fight fire with fire. A disgruntled employee or amateur stock manipulator may well be behind the rumor-mongering, and it's possible that fewer than a dozen people have happened across the comments. You'll give him credibility if you engage in a dialogue. So even if you're losing sleep in the process, ignore it.

When rumors are harmful

If a significant number of your employees, shareholders, or partners are hearing a false rumor,

you need to take action. Communicate the truth clearly and succinctly, if possible delivering your response directly to the affected audience. Be sure your response matches the problem — going overboard with a broad-scale press release, for instance, will only draw attention to the falsehoods.

Play by your own rules

If more than one of your key publics or a large proportion of your total audience is affected, a broad-scale response is appropriate. First, gather the facts and prepare a professional, comprehensive statement. Then, issue a statement in the same way your company makes its other significant announcements — in a press release posted on your web site or issued as part of a newsletter.

Are you really blameless?

It's easy to cry foul when your company gets flamed. But if you see a pattern in the negative posts, this may be a wake up call. Check up on customer relationship management, communications with stakeholders, and how HR is conducting exit interviews. If your record is spotless and you're still getting blasted, turn up your editorial outreach. Through briefings with key media and analyst contacts, your firm can share management's vision of current partnerships, future prospects, growth plans and strategies, goals and overall potentials in a forthright, factual manner.

Include Internet strategies in your communication plans

Even if your company seems too small or low-profile to be a target of negative online message exchanges, now is the time to think through your online public relations and investor relations communications strategy.

*2004 survey by PR Canada

Exclusively serving the technology business community, Ad Hoc Communication Resources is a public relations firm that advances reputations, accelerates business growth, and builds leadership positions. Ad Hoc strategists have at least 15 years of business-critical communication experience for on-call assignments, flexible engagements, and ongoing communication programs.

