

Be careful what you say – online everyone is listening

A PR executive recently experienced the downside of expressing his opinions online. Ketchum PR VP, James Andrews, was visiting the company's client FedEx at their Memphis headquarters, ironically to present on digital media to their worldwide communications team. Having arrived in Memphis he tweeted the following

"True confession but I'm in one of those towns where I scratch my head and say I would die if I had to live here!"

Unfortunately for Mr Andrews even without his talk someone at FedEx knew enough about digital media to spot his tweet. At this point things got very difficult. The FedEx employee drafted an email which was sent to senior management at FedEx and Ketchum pointing out what had been said and making some very pointed remarks about the value of communications and respecting clients.

What lessons can be learnt from this episode?

First of all that three key reasons why the online media is very powerful are that things are findable, shareable and durable. The FedEx employee could see what Mr Andrews had said on Twitter because he was following him, or even if he wasn't, his updates were not protected. The issue was then talked about and shared online and can be found in Google still for searches such as "FedEx Ketchum Twitter". This incident therefore is now a potential reputation issue and yet it started with a simple tweet of someone's personal opinion.

Second that companies and their employees should consider these risks when embarking on activities such as writing a blog or tweeting. However no matter the size of the organisation, it is helpful to all concerned, employee and employer, for there to be clear guidelines over the use of social media tools. Arguably this is particularly important with regards to something like Twitter where an individual may use their Twitter account for both personal and professional reasons. I am on Twitter - @AdParker – and this applies to me. If you review my tweets you will find that some are clearly of a personal nature e.g. playing my drums at a gig and some of a professional nature e.g. responding to a query about my company, RealWire.

But remember social media is powerful from a positive point of view for exactly the same reasons and therefore embracing this world and entering into these conversations can bring significant benefits to your company and its brand. Just remember that everyone can hear what you say!