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PR 101

Being social means having to say ‘sorry’

By Gini Dietrich

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Domino's crisis communication would have been nearly perfect...but for the 24-hour delay.

Emerging technologies in social media are traveling at the speed of light.

Anyone can upload photos, send messages, record videos, and post blogs within seconds and without supervision. As our culture tries to keep up and manage the Internet's unlimited freedoms, many companies are left waiting and hoping nothing happens to their brands. We call this the ostrich strategy—stick your head in the sand and no one will say anything negative about your brand.

But Domino's learned that strategy doesn't work. In one of the most recent social media blunders, a YouTube video turned viral when two Domino's' employees filmed themselves mishandling food. Within hours, YouTube viewers, Twitter followers, and all other social media users witnessed the offenders sticking cheese up their nose, sneezing on pizzas, and wiping food in places better left unidentified.

Fortunately, the Domino's communication team made some smart moves to help the brand through its crisis. Every strategy, from the actions to the messages, were well-thought out, consistent, and quite frankly, dead-on.

Domino's identified the audience it needed to respond to immediately. Knowing its customers were watching the YouTube video and using social media sites to spread the word, Domino's reached out to those who already knew about the issue, without drawing more external attention than necessary.

To ensure the messages reached the right audiences in the right way, Domino's made its second smart move—using social media as their primary communication outlet. Domino's quickly jumped on Twitter and Facebook to address customers' comments and concerns. By understanding its customers preferred mode of communication, Domino's was able to effectively communicate its messages to the people who mattered most.

But Domino's didn't stop there. It posted a YouTube video of its CEO apologizing for the event in an authentic way. The simple, well-spoken message clearly demonstrated the severity of the situation and the commitment to improvement. After the video aired, staffers pitched in to help direct all social media outreach and traffic to the video apology and the official statement on the corporate Web site. These online strategies not only created message consistency, but also drew customers to the Web site for more information.

The consistent, strategic, and honest message soon became one of Domino's strongest influences. Sincerely apologizing for the inappropriate and disgusting incident, Domino's ensured it would take serious action to investigate the situation. Most importantly, Domino's focused on moving forward, promising its customers that an event like this would never happen again and new processes would prevent employees, like the videoed offenders, from getting a job in the future. When faced with a crisis, no matter the magnitude, it's always more important to focus on solutions and working toward the future, than dwell on past events.

Another part of their messaging discussed the challenges social media and the Internet can create in our society. While reinforcing the idea that both the franchise and the local chain were innocent throughout this incident, Domino's reminded other franchises that similar events could happen to anyone and all companies need to be ready to respond if the time comes.



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No company is perfect. Domino's played its cards right, but almost too late in our new world of real-time conversation. According to AdAge, Domino's waited more than 24 long hours to make a move and respond after finding out about the incident through an e-mail from a consumer. The hesitation led many audiences to believe the brand would remain silent forever.

Tracking real-time conversations in today's world is essential to monitoring your brand. If Domino's were tracking social media sites, it would have learned about the video immediately and been ready to respond to customer concerns on the spot.

Though Domino's rectified its initial cautious approach, all businesses can learn from its mistake. If Domino's had a stronger social media presence before the crisis, it would have been able to participate in the conversation from the

And it's not solely the responsibility of corporate to communicate the company's values. With a business such as Domino's, it is equally important for the local franchisee to communicate with its audience and apologize to the community. Everyone needs to talk and everyone needs to respond during a crisis. Allowing franchisees to communicate company messages locally helps ease tensions and heal wounds faster.

You don't have to sit and wait for someone to ruin your brand online. By mirroring Domino's strengths and learning from its mistakes, you can take immediate, proactive steps to ready your brand for a crisis.

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