

EMOTIVE BRAND

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WHITE PAPER

Reputation Management

Good to be reactive, best to be proactive.

In a world of exploding possibilities for things to go wrong, a proactive approach to managing your reputation can be the best insurance you buy.

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“Being on top of things helps a brand react quickly and take ownership of a situation. Today an entire industry revolves around the word “reputation”. Brands that are fearful of having bad news spiral out of control have adopted a very reactive stance. They are employing people and technology in the field of “reactive reputation management” to monitor the world around them. They are trying to stay ahead of issues that can take on a life of their own in this age of instant sharing via blogging, social networking sites like Facebook, and social messaging services like Twitter. From the billions of bits of information flying around the world today, they strive to distill what’s being said about their brands, for better or worse.

Who can blame them? Negative information—whether based on facts or a naysayer’s opinion—can damage a brand. Being on top of things helps a brand react quickly and to take ownership of a situation. They can manage expectations surrounding factual events and provide information to counter spurious claims. In short, rather than being led by events, through reactive reputation management, a brand can take a leadership roll.

It’s one thing to be prepared. It’s quite another to prepare.

There is a side to reputation that has not yet received the attention it deserves: ”proactive reputation management.” This is the idea that by making your brand more meaningful to people you buy a form of insurance if and when things go wrong. By working to become more emotionally important to the people vital to your success (i.e. customers, prospects, partners, employees, and other stakeholders) you can insulate your brand from the worst effects of bad news, whether based in fact or on misleading claims.

The thinking goes that if people care more about your brand, they will be less likely to simply “accept as fact” negative comments or potentially damaging reports related to your brand. People will be protective of your brand and will not get caught up in speculation and conjecture. And, as a truly meaningful brand, people will not only defend your brand in their own minds, but they will be more likely to express their opinions to friends and family and to contribute positive, supportive stories within social media.

Becoming a meaningful brand

A brand becomes meaningful, that is—emotionally important—when the brand behaves in a way that connects what it says and does to how it makes people feel. By creating specific emotional anchors, a brand forges a stronger connection between itself and the people vital to its success. As a result, these people know more, care more, and talk more about the brand.

To achieve these ‘emotional anchors’ the brand first answers this simple, but provocative question: “How do you want people to feel about your brand one year from now?” Oddly, most brand owners have given scant thought to this

question. Why? Because the “bottom-line/shareholder return” rational imperatives of business have all but obliterated feelings and emotions from the way businesses and brands are managed.

But the changing world suggests it is time for emotions to re-emerge as a prime business tool. Re-emerge? Yes, in earlier times when business was far more one-on-one, it was the “personality” of the business-person (today’s “brand”) that often made the difference between success and failure. Customers turned to companies that made them feel good. Good employees stayed with bosses that made them feel good.

Once a brand seeking a meaningful reputation determines how it would like people to feel in the near future, they ‘backcast’ and see the gaps between where they are now and where they seek to be. They then examine every interaction between the brand and the people vital to its success and modify them so as to ensure each interaction evokes the brand’s chosen emotional anchors. By integrating these emotions into the way the brand does every aspect of its business, the brand earns itself a more meaningful and valuable reputation.

Not a “PR” or “marketing” idea, rather a way to build value across your business.

To be truly meaningful—and to accrue value by being so—brands need to evoke a considered emotional response in everything they do. It is not only how the advertising is crafted or the press event is staged. It is about the way every aspect of how the brand does its business. There is the saying, “It takes a village,” and this notion of cause, coordination, and cooperation lies at the heart of proactive reputation management.

The cause unifies and focuses the effort. Coordination ensures that every one involved genuinely “walks the talk.” What follows from cause and coordination, when deployed in a sensitive and authentic manner, is a spirit of cooperation: the grease that makes the wheels of meaning turn. The people vital to your brand’s success see your employees and partners working in unison and with a greater sense of purpose. At the same time, the positive energy created through this level of cooperation keeps your employees and partners motivated, satisfied, and fulfilled. This, in turn, encourages them to further deepen the emotional resonance of the brand in more and more situations.

Proactive reputation management calls for a holistic shift in the way you do business. The end result is a new culture for the business behind our brand—a culture imbued with meaning and value.

People see your brand as something different from your competition.

It is increasingly hard to create strong and enduring brand differentiation through products and services (the things you do). Attempts to differentiate through communications (the things you say) falls on the increasingly distanced and cynical ears of beleaguered people. By transforming the way you do business—aligning to a strong purpose and emotional space—you create meaningful differentiation. People distinguish you based on how you make them feel.

Your brand moves from being ‘good enough’ to being a “must have.”

The goal of a brand is to become the preferred choice for all the people vital to its success. Preference that is emotionally based is far more powerful and enduring. It peaks at the point at which people feel they are sad, even angry, when they can’t have your brand and have to settle for an alternative they now clearly see as “something less.”

Your brand becomes more attractive to new customers.

One of the hardest tasks for a brand is to increase sales by shifting people away from the competition. People don't like to change and often easily settle for less than they deserve. But a highly emotive brand proposition elevates your brand from the fray and serves as a compelling magnet for prospects.

Your customers stay with you longer.

It costs far more to recruit a new customer than to keep an existing customer loyal. And while much has been done to “buy” customer loyalty through rewards programs, the most powerful loyalty flows from feelings—feelings that reflect shared values, ambitions, and beliefs. With customers, employees and partners bonded emotionally to your brand, competitors will find it virtually impossible to lure them away. In the meantime, with little effort, you enjoy again and again the benefits of people being loyal to your brand.

Customers recommend you to their family and friends.

Treat them right and they'll pay you back. Increasingly people say their trust in “institutional” advice is severely eroded and that their trust in “personal” advice is corresponding high. Brand advocacy comes from people having stories to tell about your brand; stories that illustrate the emotional impact your brand has had on the storyteller. By linking the rational stories of what you do to your brand's chosen emotional anchors, the people important to you remember more about you and talk more freely about you—both in person and online.

Your employees work with greater purpose and are happier in their work.

Employee morale is increasingly the ‘deal breaker’ between success and failure. The attitudes and behavior of employees convey strong emotional signals that define your brand's reputation. You may offer the best product or services, but if your employees work in an emotionally bankrupt culture, your brand will suffer. Proactive reputation management is about aligning employees around a common, believable and actionable purpose and showing them the benefits of evoking specific emotions in the effort of making them more effective—and happier—employees.

Great people want to join your company.

Recruitment of the best people becomes easier when they see that your company is working to a specific purpose and in an emotionally important way. By readily seeing—and feeling—the difference your brand offers (both in the marketplace but also to themselves) prospective recruits put your company at the top of their short-list.

People more rapidly acknowledge you as a good citizen.

People with whom you have become emotionally important think more about you, care more for you and talk more about you. They better absorb and appreciate your efforts in the realm of corporate social responsibility. They are more likely to support and defend your brand and actively argue on your behalf.

Where there's a will, there's a way.

At Emotive Brand we specialize in proactive reputation management. We have a proprietary method that helps brands identify the 'emotional anchors' that, together with a clear statement of purpose, are used to reshape the many interactions between a brand and the people vital to its success. We bring design-led thinking to each interaction, striving to make each more powerful both in terms of the rational content delivered and the emotional impact realized.

It is a tough world out there—a world in which many things might go wrong and in which many people might end up feeling wronged. It makes sense to be prepared to react should bad things happen. It is wise to take the proactive steps that can insulate your brand from the worst.

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More information on Emotive Brand can be found at <http://www.emotivebrand.com>.