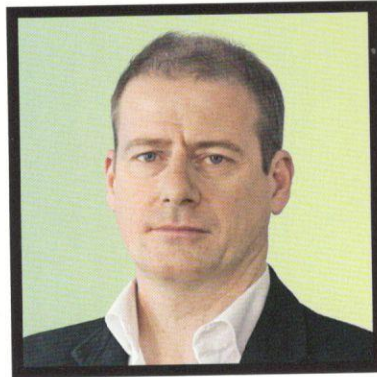


BRAND COMMUNICATIONS



Simon Wadsworth

The balance between audience online and website ranking potential has become the holy grail

Reputation has always been central to brand identity, and the growing dominance of digital content is redefining the way PR teams need to approach maintaining strong brand reputations.

In this new landscape, having strong, credible press and content online on a brand's search results is key. Consistency – reinforcing a single brand identity across all digital assets – is also paramount. The days of calling in your PR team to firefight are gone. These days it's about being proactive and building positive page-one content.

Creating this type of presence requires Google-smart comms strategies and a technical knowledge of how search engines rank and display articles. It's an area the PR industry should be making its own – offering a vital add-on to existing services and tapping into a valuable source of new revenue.

So how can you advise clients about brand reputation in the digital age? How do you maintain a positive position in an ever-changing online space? And what kind of opportunities do these challenges create for UK PR professionals?

In the first instance, PR teams or internal brand comms departments must be even more aware of everything being said about a brand online. Instigating regular monitoring to identify potential problems online is crucial.

The PR industry has been an amazing advocate for social media, helping clients embrace the many benefits. Now those conversations have been started, clients need to keep them under control, ensuring brand messaging remains clear.

But brand reputation management is not about waiting for problems to arise, it's about making companies 'bomb-proof' and able to withstand future tests. Creating a suite of optimised digital assets and promoting positive coverage that will rank a brand's name or key services highly is a must. We also need to ask whether a client's wider brand principles are being applied not just to marketing materials but to online content and social media? Is there a consistent approach across all of a brand's sites, such as on LinkedIn and Twitter?

How we measure success is changing too. In an era where maintaining positive Google pages is crucial, quality rather than quantity is important. Targeting a smaller number of authoritative sites will create a more robust reputation. Finding a balance between audience online and website ranking potential is what leads to winning campaigns now. Keeping a close eye on the way Google ranks content – and changes to the algorithms – will make this easier too.

Occupying page one is only part of the battle; more than ever, content has to be up to the job. Appearing on sites such as the BBC or online versions of broadsheet newspapers may serve a brand's reputation well, but the entry level is high – and pieces must be genuinely newsworthy and well written.

By helping clients understand all of these changes we can help deliver more effective brand reputation management – bringing long-term benefits for their businesses and ours.

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