

PR Goes DIGITAL

With the advent of digital media, the role of public relations has a greater responsibility to manage and protect a company's reputation, while increasing visibility.

According to Rob Bazemore, president, Janssen Biotech, PR plays a valuable role in building and maintaining the visibility of the company and its brands among patient audiences through educational resources, advocacy collaborations, and traditional and social media campaigns. The com-

pany has launched several disease awareness campaigns to provide education, resources, and hope for those living with serious inflammatory diseases. Two examples of these campaigns are Janssen's Are You Serious? (SeriousAboutPsoriasis.com) and IBD Icon (IBDIcons.com).

"As a pharma company that has been treating immunology and oncology diseases for more than a decade, and investigating them even longer, we have gained rich insights into the needs of our patients along their treatment journey," Mr. Bazemore says. "Based on this knowledge, we have launched national disease awareness initiatives that connect with our patients in unique and meaningful ways and have leveraged the use of inspiring video content, peer-to-peer story sharing, and social media engagement."

Engagement and gathering knowledge about patients is now easier, especially with the emergence of e-patients, who are highly activated information seekers who want relevant, timely information from drug makers, as well as two-way communication.

"As a patient-centric company, UCB views this as an immense opportunity to connect with such individuals to learn more about our patients and how we can best serve their needs," says Andrea Levin, associate director, public relations and communications, UCB. "These patients can provide valuable insights into various stages of the drug life cycle and contribute to our innovation."

Despite ongoing pressure to do more with less, PR as a profession still needs to be the face and voice of the company.

"At its core, PR is social — it is about connecting and shaping opinion, gaining insights into people's interests and perspectives to find ideas and messages that can attract and hold people's attention in a sustained way," says Kathy Bloomgarden, CEO of Ruder Finn. "This is the essence of building the trust that is at the center of a company's reputation."



“With the ever-increasing role of online media paired with traditional channels, having an understanding of the influencers and how they interact is paramount.”

DONNA LAVOIE / LaVoie Group

Beyond reputation management, PR in digital can also help put a face on the corporation and create a more human aspect to the company and the brand. Ms. Bloomgarden suggests that companies do this by helping the public to understand the hopes and aspirations of the employees at these companies who come to work each day to discover new medicines for patients in need.

"By showing the public what drives employees and how they manage the challenges of scientific activities that offer great promise and yet can falter midway, we elevate the experiences of employees and reveal the human side of companies," she says.

In the recent climate of product recalls,



“Today’s hyper-connected world offers pharmaceutical companies an unprecedented opportunity to build and reinforce their reputations with multiple stakeholders.”

MANISHA PAI / Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Company

“ The growth of social media has reinforced the foundation of good public relations: the need to tell a compelling story in the right way to the right audience at the right time.”

JODI AMENDOLA / Amendola Communications



“ At its core, PR is social — it is about connecting and shaping opinion, gaining insights into people’s interests and perspectives to find ideas and messages that can attract and hold their attention in a sustained way.”

KATHY BLOOMGARDEN / Ruder Finn

drug withdrawals, and compliance problems, reputational management is crucial for the industry as a whole and the individual companies within it, says Manisha Pai, head of public relations, Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Company.

“The public relations function is on the front lines of both proactively building and reactively managing corporate reputation,” she says. “Today’s hyper-connected world offers pharmaceutical companies an unprecedented opportunity to build and reinforce their reputations with multiple stakeholders.”

PR plays a vital role in this regard by keeping the lines of communications open and transparent among those who can influence others, for better or for worse, says Todd Forte, executive VP, MCS Healthcare Public Relations. As a result, PR has to be ever more vigilant in serving as the guardian of that which others might harm.



“While a good reputation generally takes years to develop, a single misstep can reduce that reputation to a quaint memory virtually overnight,” he says. “Enter social media. Given the world stage of blogs, message boards, and websites, even the perception of a misdeed can become permanently affixed to a company’s reputation for years to come.”

Tom Jones, senior VP, health practice, Makovsky, compares the role of PR in today’s digital world to being the quarterback on a football team.

“Like a quarterback studying film, surveying the field, and calling the right plays, public relations teams work across myriad critical functions to ensure messages are consistent, reach the right people in an accessible and palatable way, and elevate company and brand value,” he says. “We live and work in a world of truly integrated communications. This means every message, through every channel, whether a marketing brochure, blog post, trade show booth, one-on-one sales call, patient education pamphlet, grant, or iPad app, contributes to the overall value that stakeholders perceive.”

“Moreover, PR professionals not only have to build the company’s reputation, we also have to protect it,” Ms. Levin adds.

“The growth of social media has reinforced the foundation of good public relations: the need to tell a compelling story in the right way to the right audience at the right time,” says Jodi Amendola, CEO, Amendola Communications. “Communication vehicles may be changing, but the power of peer-to-peer



“ While a good reputation generally takes years to develop, a single misstep can reduce that reputation to a quaint memory virtually overnight.”

TODD FORTE / MCS Healthcare Public Relations

testimonials remains the most credible information. Having a physician share his or her positive experiences with a particular medication or company on Sermo; a personal blog; through an online post; or a patient or family member doing the same online through patientslikeme, Facebook, tweets, a YouTube video, or other outlets connects on an emotional level that company-supplied information can’t match.”

According to Ms. Pai, social media is a more casual form of PR — it’s the jeans and flip-flops, not the suit and heels of external communications.

“When it’s done well, social media provides a direct and near-immediate channel for engaging with stakeholders and putting a human voice with a pharmaceutical company, enabling that company to build connections that might not have been possible 10 years ago,” she says.

With the ever-increasing role of online media paired with traditional channels, having an understanding of the influencers and how they interact is paramount, says Donna LaVoie, president and CEO, LaVoie Group.

“PR will continue to play a pivotal role in the communications spectrum both from a corporate and brand perspective,” she says. **PV**