

# Is Your PR Strategy Up-to-Date?

In an ever-evolving industry, social networks, blogs and mobile devices are becoming increasingly important in creating successful PR strategies.

By PATRICK S. DUFFY



Over the past few months — and as a result of the spokesperson role I played with Hanley Wood Market Intelligence prior to founding MetroIntelligence — our team has also been slowly expanding more into offering public relations services for our clients. To jump-start this initiative, we decided to partner with ICON Imaging PR in Los Angeles, which was founded in 1997 by news veterans Sharon and Bob Jimenez, and leverages their deep local and national connections in real estate, politics and entertainment.

Consequently, I wanted to review some of the ways in which companies are now reaching out to the media, the community and their customers.

From the perspective of Sharon, especially, a former Emmy-winning reporter who has worked with everyone from local real estate developers and independent film producers to state senators and even a two-time Presidential candidate, she would certainly agree that the public relations world of today is a far different animal than it was even 10 years ago.

Certainly the PR vehicle which continues to morph and evolve the most is that of social media, centered primarily around Facebook, Twitter, YouTube — and perhaps Google+ — and, for professional networking, LinkedIn. According to Sharon, when she was put in charge of making Rep. Dennis Kucinich a household name back in 2003, it was by leveraging nascent social networking platforms that the campaign was able to raise \$10 million online — in large part because they could publish the candidate's entire platform

for potential supporters to see.

By the 2008 election cycle, the rise of Facebook, YouTube and blogging platforms gave rise to campaign-supported operatives who would continue to win debate points long after the actual broadcast had finished. Indeed, it was largely due to the pioneering efforts of the 2004 election that a young and ambitious junior Senator from Ill. named Barack Obama was able to harness the

Internet's power to gather both funds and volunteers, thereby bypassing not only traditional means of building support, but shunting aside presumed Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton in the process.

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among U.S. companies, the building industry remains somewhat disjointed. Whereas Lennar has clearly made strides across the social media spectrum — to the point of setting up separate Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts for multiple divisions — some other large builders make little or no mention of their social media efforts even on the home pages of their own Websites. At the same time, while company blogs remain largely nonexistent, useful mobile applications directing buyers to active projects continue to proliferate.

In theory, an active online campaign would position a builder as a thought leader to foster discussions on the economic, environmental and political policies which directly impact housing. If your goal is to get buyers to agree that a new home can offer superior energy efficiency and design, why not let them come to that conclusion on their own? Instead,

more often than not, these pages are used to repurpose print ads and to discuss current promotions, which can often have the opposite effect on an ad-weary public.

In addition, having an attentive point person assigned to social media on a regular basis can solve minor problems while demonstrating that the company is serious about having a two-way conversation. For example, when a new buyer of a Shea Homes model complained about signage across the street which needed to be taken down from a sold-out community, it was gone almost immediately — much to the delight of the Facebook member. One can only imagine the positive network effect that single action may have on future sales — and at a very low cost.



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## Fast Facts

- Use social media to position your company as a thought leader.
- Cross-promote all of your social media efforts as much as possible.
- Blogs can provide more flexibility than traditional social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.
- Assign an internal or external point person to ensure that your social media efforts are updated regularly.