



SOCIAL MEDIA AND SHIPPING

New Media

With Twitter feeds, Snapchat images and Facebook posts at our fingertips and Instagram images spreading like wildfire around the world, when things goes wrong in shipping it can become big news in an instant.

Here Edward Ion of maritime crisis consultants Helix Media, outlines the challenges presented by new media and the steps shipping companies can take to protect their reputations.

We probably all know of incidents where employee indiscretions online have caused concern. And we are all only too aware of high profile cases where a disaster has been quickly followed by a proliferation of online images and stories which have fanned the flames and hit the headlines.

There is no doubt the resulting reputational damage could have been limited for the companies involved if their internal policies and communications responses had been as good as their state-of-the-art technical and operational responses.

Serious issue

In an industry like shipping, which is not always shown in a positive light by the mainstream news media, when something goes wrong it's hardly surprising it will be jumped on.

Which is why taking social media seriously is so important.

Even if it's not 'your thing' as an operator to seek a high profile, there needs to be an awareness that someone, somewhere could, at any time, be damaging your reputation.

You need both to keep a close eye on your employees and crews' social media use, as well as what other sources are saying about you, and to know how to deal with anything negative – instantly.

While a major shipping incident will always attract dramatic footage and headlines news, there are many other smaller incidents which can be just as harmful to your company's reputation if social media is not handled correctly.

For example, a life boat drill going badly wrong and being filmed by the mate on his I-Phone. It may seem innocnt to him to post this on You Tube or Twitter at the time.

But such a posting – and there are many on social media today- can cause significant image and reputational problems for an owner or manager.



The key point is that if owners/managers do not have guidelines for crew and staff, then sooner or later, a mistake will be made.

Damage limitation

Companies like Helix Media focus on damage control, enabling companies to engage with their audiences and stakeholders to reassure them that everything that can be done is being done: we make sure the right message about what you're doing gets out there.

But what can you and your company do to protect your reputation from the potentially lethal effect of negative information and images freely available online? Here are some ideas:

Social media starter kit

- Put a social media policy in place so employees know what is expected of them in terms of their rights and responsibilities
- Task someone with monitoring social media streams
- Respond quickly in a crisis –nothing is more harmful than silence or the fatal words “No comment”
- Respond where the crisis started first; follow up on other venues/ platforms later
- Ensure everyone in your organisation knows the company has an issue that day; the most dangerous person in the office is the person who does not know what is going on
- Have a ‘dark site’ ready – a site or simply a page on your website which is ready for immediate use if a social media crisis engulfs your company
- Acknowledge the issue: simply saying “yes we are aware of this development and we are prepared to handle it” is a good start in your social media engagement.
- Keep your eyes and ears open –what are people saying about you in traditional and social media?

Start out by 'lurking' – reading and digesting information and posts without actively contributing and engaging – it's a sensible way to begin.



Emergency Response

Should the worst happen, a quick response, including the use of PR Consultants will assist in mitigating the fallout that may follow.

Reputations can take a life time to build, but only moments to lose.

They are valuable, so be proactive in protecting them.

Edward Ion

Helix Media Pte Ltd

Managing Partner

T : 65 6222 6375 / M : 65 9111 6871

E : edward.ion@helixmedia.asia