

Scrooge! Your ideas on averting a PR crisis

December 21, 2009 by James Ainsworth

We had some great ideas from our readers on how to handle the festive yet fictitious PR crisis of Dickens' most miserable small business owner, Scrooge.

First up, @SimonJTurner suggested the simple use of a social media and search strategy in order to play to his negative strengths, saying he would recommend that Ebenezer "go down the Social Media route - Portray his 'Bah Humbug' sentiments as ironic & give him a blog for link bait."

Similarly, @theinsidelineuk reckoned that Scrooge has all the qualities necessary to be the face of a price comparison website. His thrifty, tight-pocketed character is a natural fit with such a venture and @theinsidelineuk even suggested a name and strapline: "Scrooge.com - Saving you money, on everything!"

The wider debate of dealing with a tricky PR case was explored by Chris Hughes, head of PR and communications with Sine Qua Non International Ltd. "The knack to any crisis is to avert it in the first place!" Chris stressed. "Assuming we are past that stage, the business owner should use local media to give staff the feeling that they are an integral cog in the business wheel."

The Frockery offered some rather creative thoughts on how to deal with Scrooge the small business way - and got in a cunning plug for their business at the same time:

"As one of our best customers, Scrooge is better known to us as Sustaina Bill! Like us, he believes it's not only frugal, but also fashionable and eco-friendly to go retro, and he carries off that Victorian re-enactor's costume better than most. Look after the planet and the wallet will look after itself, he reckons – and besides, it's all positive PR.

"This Christmas, he tells us that, having saved so much money at The Frockery, he is treating his staff to two pints of lager and a packet of crisps (each!) in true Scroogeness abounds style."

Of course, Scrooge could be seen as a hopeless case. After all, in A Christmas Carol this cruellest, most cold-hearted of individuals was beyond earthly influence and needed a magical intervention to see the error of his ways. Emily Cagle, a Marketing Donut expert, wonders whether ANY PR company could handle such a difficult account:

"My feeling is that no honest PR could rescue Scrooge's reputation," she admits. "Any claims that put a spin on his motives would be dishonest, and, contrary to popular belief, that's not what PR is all about! You could argue that he's just a shrewd businessman and try to pitch

him as a savvy entrepreneur, likeable because of sheer success - but without any evidence of redeeming or charitable behaviour in any area of his life, that would be a hard one to sell. He's a pretty two-dimensional baddy until he starts to reflect on his past."

A post-visitation Scrooge, however, is a different prospect altogether and Emily reckons any PR firm worth its salt should be able to make hay from the inspirational story of a reformed businessman with a new outlook on life. "There's a great 'turning over a new leaf' angle, of course, which, if pitched right, could get national interest given the amount of money he has accumulated and the very human story of young Tim and his family," she explains. "There could also be interest from HR and business press, both in Scrooge the man, and in the business case study if Scrooge was able to measure productivity and profit levels before and after his shift to the goodwill approach. A little regular, ongoing charity work in the community, and he could be looking at a reasonably good reputation."

Amen to that. Thanks for all your contributions - and have a prosperous, enjoyable and relaxing Christmas and New Year.