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a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action
issue #37: are you losing control of your corporate identity?

editor's message

As promised, this month we follow up on the implication of last month's discussion of Web 2.0 (<http://www.trekconsulting.com/Newsletter/Issue37/Issue37.html>). The new openness of business in the Web 2.0 world can be scary. Your company is subject to instant comment or discussion all over the Web—on blogs, YouTube, or any number of other new sites.

What does this mean for you as a manager? This month we share some ideas on how to stay "in control" in this new open world. In Strategic Thinking we introduce the paradox of image management in today's world—controlling without controlling. In Strategic Action, we help you think about how this affects you as a manager. Our Industry Snapshot has an interesting illustration of this new openness, and the Reading List features *Mavericks at Work*.

strategic thinking

The Control Paradox

A few months ago, we reviewed a book called *Naked Conversations* - <http://www.trekconsulting.com/Newsletter/Issue32/Issue32.html#ReadingList> (which is a great image for how most people feel in today's world). I don't have to tell you that the Internet has made more and more information available. You benefit from it, but you can also pay a price.

More than ever, you have to consider appearances. Before you do something, you need to think about how it would look if your actions today were to be published on a blog or news site tonight or tomorrow. Your customers, your competitors, your investors (and even your employees) are out there watching. What will they think when they read (or maybe write) about your latest moves?

But here's the paradox. You cannot control your image by controlling the information that gets out about your company. Sure, you can and should take steps to keep proprietary information confidential. But most of what you do will be subject to comment. So the only way you can control your image is by not controlling, but by acting in a way that is open to scrutiny and being honest.

That's a tough message to swallow. But, if you think about it, with the ever shrinking world and ever more available information, you don't have any choice.

-Mary Adams (adams@trekconsulting.com)

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strategic action

How to Control Without Controlling

So how do you live with the paradox and control without controlling? You need to speak first and often about what you are doing. And, of course, you need to know what people are saying about you. At a minimum, everybody in your management group should have his or her own name and the company name set up for Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) or another similar system. Google Alerts pick up web news and blog mentions. It's free, easy to set up, and provides an early-warning system to your name being out there.

Knowing what others are saying about you and your company isn't enough. You need to take the offensive. These days, it's generally better to disclose your intentions and reasons why you are making a significant move before the market assigns their own logic to your decisions. For example, in late March, Circuit City replaced 8,500 in-store sales people with less experienced, less expensive salespeople. They expected a bounce in their stock price. However, the action was handled poorly, and the blogs chewed them up for what was perceived as a planned reduction in the quality of in-store customer service. Better, pro-active communication could have avoided this, assuming they did have a good reason for their decision. In any case, here's how one blog reacted (<http://www.blogging-stocks.com/2007/03/30/circuit-citys-firing-of-highest-paid-employees-indicates-some-c/>).

Jet Blue's February disaster is another example. Weaknesses in its communications and emergency planning were brought to light by storms that caused thousands of passengers to be stranded in airports and on planes throughout the Northeast. It responded with apologies (in print, on television and its website) and recognition of its problem as well as announcements of how it planned to remedy the situation. Through these actions (click here for an example as posted in the New York Times - <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/19/business/19jetblue.html?ex=1329541200&en=a9dbe269ede6bf58&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>), Jet Blue regained some of its reputation as an excellent customer service company.

Don't get caught unprepared. The only way to control your image in today's market is to be part of the conversation...and be civilized about it.

- *Michael Oleksak* (oleksak@trekconsulting.com)

industry snapshot

New Thoughts on Protecting Intellectual Property

We were struck by a recent article in PC World that described the changing outlook of Don Tapscott, a writer and speaker on technology, about his own intellectual property. Tapscott asserted, "If I could give away my book I would. I have a publisher and I need to have a publisher to print, distribute and promote (the book). We did talk them into letting us release the first three chapters and you can get a PDF of those free on the Web. The publisher also agreed to (let) the last chapter be a wiki that we don't even own."

He also explained that in the past he would have objected to having people tape his presentation (he'll do roughly 80 speeches this year). "Now I let people video me all the time," he says. "You can go on the Web and there are all kinds of videos of me giving talks."

Where does this leave Tapscott? In order to get attention and build credibility, he now believes that sharing is the most powerful way of selling. It's all about controlling without controlling...

Read the full article (<http://www.pcworld.ca/news/column/ebbb3af20a01040800470a37413dba21/pg0.htm>).

reading list

Mavericks at Work: Why the Most Original Minds in Business Win

By Bill Taylor, cofounder of the magazine *Fast Company* and Polly LaBarre, a longtime editor at *Fast Company*

Taylor and LaBarre traveled far and wide to profile thirty-two companies that are unique in the way they approach business. These companies ranged widely—from retail and Internet banking to a board game manufacturer, entertainment companies like Pixar and HBO, and a gold mine. These companies appeal to their customers by thinking differently about customer service, product delivery, and the incorporation of open source influences on business.

This book doesn't have a magic formula for success. However, it does have some great stories that will stick with you (stories have a way of doing that), and one or two that may inspire a change in attitude, thinking or action that will make you or your company that much more successful.

Read more about this book (<http://www.mavericksatwork.com/>).



announcements

Trek Consulting was recently featured in an article by Lori McLeod of the Financial Post in Toronto, "Betting on the Equity All-Stars: Investors Must Learn to Assign a Value to Managers as Private-equity Firms Prepare to Go Public." McLeod took a fascinating look at the role of intellectual capital in the analysis and valuation of the Blackstone IPO.

Read this insightful view of this blockbuster transaction (<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/financialpost/story.html?id=86642052-843f-48b6-8acc-1feefe559223&k=20695>).

Trek Principal Mary Adams will be making a general session speech at ConsultingWorld in Orlando on June 25th. Mary will be speaking on "The Intangible (But Very Real) Opportunity for Consultants." For more information about this event, which is co-hosted by the American Management Association and the Institute of Management Consultants, visit the ConsultingWorld web site (<http://www.amanet.org/events/consulting-world/>).

In next month's issue, we'll talk about Thomas Friedman's latest advice to the U.S. on going green.

about trek consulting

Trek Consulting LLC helps companies to face the challenges of growth, building value and dealing with change. Since 1999, we have been a valued partner to business owners and leaders on their arduous journey to business success. We know that we cannot make this journey for our clients, but we can make it easier and more successful. We focus on getting you the best information available, facilitating sound planning and decision-making, making sure you have the right skills and resources to face your challenge, and coaching you through the roadblocks that invariably arise along the way.

Our clients report improved market focus, greater revenues, better margins and increased profits. To learn more about Trek Consulting and how we can help you improve your company's results, visit us on the web at www.trekconsulting.com or call us at 781-729-1008.