

What You Are Speaks So Loud...

Building And Protecting Your Reputation

WILD WEST 2.0, How To Protect And Restore Your Online Reputation On The Untamed Social Frontier. By Michael Fertik and David Thompson. Amacom, NY,2010. 264pp.

My old philosophy professor, Sidney Hook, asked the question, “If you could have a magic carpet that took you anyplace you wanted to go, would you want it?” Of course. “But if the price were a million lives a year, would you willingly pay it?” Of course not. “But that’s what the automobile is, isn’t it?” he replied.

The point Professor Hook made is that for every act of progress, there’s a price. That’s also the point of this book.

The price of the extraordinary gift of the internet, and even the so-called social media, is the vulnerability of one’s reputation.

What the social media has given us is extraordinary access to a world that has hitherto been available only to owners of the printing press or the broadcast station. It’s a blessing that’s been used for good and ill, with, we hope the emphasis on good. It allows anybody with access to a computer (which means virtually all of us) access to an audience that could be one or millions. It is so effective that for all the good it does in giving public voice to the masses, it can do damage as well. For example, the newspaper business is being devastated by the public forum, as is the U.S. Postal Service.

It can, on the one hand, enhance reputation. And on the other, it can destroy reputation. That’s what this book is about -- protecting your online reputation.

It’s comprehensive, describing in great detail the several (but not all) meanings of reputation, in terms of the several audiences – from private and personal to corporate.

The next phase of the book describes how to use the social media to build and enhance reputation...a subject that, today, is not too obscure. "Creating your own content," say the authors, "builds a Google wall against false, misleading, or negative search results." Also encourage others to add positive content to your site.

Other advice is to know your audience, and to perform an online reputation audit, by Googling yourself frequently to see what others are saying about you.

So far, nothing particularly new, at this stage in the history of social media and the internet, but yet, well worth saying.

The meat of the book lies in the last chapters, which describe some of the things that can help protect your name and reputation should you be attacked. Here, though, we hearken to the electronic version of advice long given by public relations professionals in dealing with smears and character attacks in print media. (May I refer you to the article following this on the home page, entitled, *Spinning Out of Control*.)

There are some basic realities to be considered, the most noteworthy being that in the social media, as in traditional journalism, good chasing after bad rarely catches up, so you have to keep reinforcing the good. This book contributes substantially to the methodology. And the authors reiterate that a sound reputation, like any sound foundation, is pretty hard to destroy.

A sound reputation is not something that can be spun overnight by a public relations' practitioner. It must be predicated on reality, because, as I've often said in these and other pages, the acoustics of the marketplace are excellent, and shallowness and unfounded reputation shout out reality. Or as the philosopher said, "What you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say you are."

The mechanics of protecting and sustaining your reputation are not particularly complex. This book spells it out clearly. In this era of the hacker, take heed.

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