

INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN DAVIES, ONLINE PR SPECIALIST AND CONSULTANT FOR ACTION GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

Q1: Undoubtedly we are in the social media era. Social Media applications are booming and their format varies. How do you comment on this?

Up until a few years ago most people hadn't even heard of YouTube or Facebook. Now they're ranked no.3 and no.4 most popular websites in the world. We don't know what's coming next, but one thing is certain – social media will continue to grow in importance and popularity.

Q2: Which do you think is the role of social media today?

Social media is about people with a common interest coming together regardless of where they live. It's for the people and powered by the people. Any organisation wishing to engage in this medium must take a different approach to traditional media methods.

Q3: What can they provide to individuals and businesses?

For individuals it's about being part of a community and all the benefits associated with this: help, sociability, knowledge-sharing, advice etc. For businesses it's the opportunity to build relationships with these communities in a meaningful way, by providing value.

Q4: Has social media changed the way we communicate our messages?

Social media has changed the 'traditional media' landscape forever. Prior to social media it was media corporations that fully controlled the media agenda. Now the individual not only can choose which media he or she wants to consume but they can also create their own media: the evidence speaks for itself, with millions of YouTube videos and 133 million+ blogs in the world.

Q5: How have they changed the consumer's behaviour?

Individuals now have more choice with regard to the media they consume and can now 'tune out' of marketing messages and easily find content interesting and entertaining to them. The large media companies no longer have complete control of the content.

Q6: How has the modern model of Public Relations been transformed with the new status quo of media and has the relationship of consumers and businesses been transformed?

While traditional PR in the offline often works as a 'one-way and one to many' approach, online it works as a 'two-way and many to many' type model. People can respond so it's two-way conversational which, of course, they can't easily do with offline media.

Q7: In the current financial downturn how should businesses consider their Public Relations? Is online more profitable and less costly and how?

PR fees will always vary according to the work's scope and type, whether offline or online, but campaigns don't need to be expensive in order to be effective and gain great results. Clients also shouldn't disregard offline PR. Newspapers, radio and TV still have lots of consumers so it's important for PR professionals to take a holistic, integrated approach when working on client projects.

Q8: Can you give us some brief tips for successful online Public Relations?

- **Research first.** The online world is vast, complex and diverse so it is important that a company understands the online landscape before doing anything.
- **Strategise.** It's important that companies evaluate and plan their PR well, and consider a range of communication tactics and tools. All PR should work hand in hand with their business objectives.
- **Produce good content.** Any organisation looking to engage online effectively must produce interesting and compelling content.

Q9: What are you predictions for the digital media and social networks and which do you think is the next step?

Social media is only going to grow in more importance. The younger generations now growing up with social media do it like breathing - without effort. If PR professionals don't understand what the 16–24 year olds do, then the PR industry will be in trouble.