

Crisis Control Newsletter

Crisis Control Newsletter from RQA, Inc.—A Catlin Preferred Provider to Foodservice, Food Processing and Consumer Products Industries

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Reputation Management and Social Media

We've heard it said, "Reputation is Everything". Companies need to protect their image and brand names. With the exponentially increasing popularity of social media on sites such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, tumblr., Pinterest, etc., anyone can express their thoughts and opinions, whether or not substantiated. Social media has opened the lines of communication worldwide within a matter of seconds and offers anyone a forum to comment positively or negatively about your company's products or services. Companies need to recognize the benefits and the risks presented by social media.

Businesses are using social media as a way to retain current customers and attract new ones. Often, these days, social media is an integral part of any marketing plan. And the followers and "likes" of these social media accounts can offer a company valuable data that can help a company in a myriad of ways. However, with the numerous benefits also comes new risks and potential liabilities for the company in protecting its reputation and possibly even its livelihood.

Companies should participate in social media to stay on top of what is being said, or not said, about their company. Participating also allows a company to monitor its social media presence and develop positive relationships with these online groups. Comments both positive and negative can help a company strengthen their brands. Should rumors start or there be a barrage of verbal attacks, the company can somewhat control the chatter and even ask to take down untrue statements. Not only is it important for a company to track what is being said about them and their products, it is also important to track competitors. Sometimes the focus of the banter may be the industry as a whole or possibly you're taking the brunt of a competitor's issue. Even though comments may not be directed to your company, your company can suffer the effects.

Companies should be prepared before a social media crisis hits. Put a plan in place now that takes into account a risk assessment and discusses what may impact your business. Determine what mitigation strategies your company needs to consider to address these issues and assign responsibility for enacting the plan. The more prepared you are in advance will help to mitigate any severe impact to your business. And once you have a plan in place, make sure to run simulations to ensure that the plan will be effective when and if needed.

When negative comments are made, try to track or source the information. Consider the comments made, sometimes it is best to do nothing. Make sure to comment not only on your company's own web pages or other social media accounts, but within the stream of comments on that particular account. It's imperative that comments your company makes be truthful and backed up by facts. A company's reputation can suffer even more if the comments are made with emotion or are argumentative.

The last thing we want to do is sabotage our own reputation. Establishing employee policies for social media is a must and all employees should be trained and aware of these policies. Even employees that are the best advocates for your business may unintentionally cause reputation harm. Enforcing a company disclosure policy, redefining your crisis communications plan and training employees on on-line protocols will help to ensure your good company name and brands are protected.

Social Media Employee Policy

Policies and guidelines that establish what is and is not acceptable in social media has become an important factor in protecting a company's reputation. Many companies have implemented a social media plan to address the challenges of today's online presence. This process starts with the establishment of a reputation management team. Usually, this team has representation from various functional departments within an organization such as marketing, sales, legal, IT, HR, PR, etc.

While employees may have the best of intentions, what they say on social media sites/blogs may be harmful to your company. Anything said about your company shapes public opinion and adds to your company's reputation either positively or negatively. It is important that all interaction on the Internet be respectful, knowledgeable and professional. Employee guidelines for social media use establishes what is and is not acceptable when talking about the company, its products/brands, customers, employees, etc.

Make sure there are policies to protect your company about employee creation of or posting to social media sites/blogs that include such matters as:

- Confidential and proprietary information about the company, its products/brands, customers, or any information that has not been publically released, etc. is strictly prohibited from sharing
- Company logo or trademarks may not be used without explicit approval in writing
- No products or services can be sold that would compete with the company
- Respect employees/co-workers by getting their permission before writing about them no matter what the message
- Always write with the utmost of professionalism
- Express the views as yours alone and not that of the company
- If approached by media to engage in a conversation through social media, refer the media to the appropriate company contact
- Institute disciplinary action if employees comments can be malicious, defamatory, libelous, or harmful to the company or employees in any of the ways mentioned above

While this is not a complete list, consider what other situations may affect your company and write those policies in the social media plan.

Food and Drug Administration Recalls (www.fda.gov)

Product: Dried Apricots
Incident: Possible Health Risk–Undeclared Allergen

A Secaucus, NJ firm is recalling dried apricots sold in a 16.1 oz. container because they contain undeclared sulfites. People who have an allergy or severe sensitivity to sulfites run the risk of serious or life-threatening allergic reaction if they consume this product. The recalled product was sold nationwide in clear plastic containers and is a product of Turkey. So far no illnesses or customer complaints have been reported to date. The recall was initiated after a routine sampling by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Food Inspectors and a subsequent analysis of the product by Food Laboratory personnel. The reports revealed the presence of sulfites in the dried apricots, which did not declare sulfites on the label. People who have a severe sensitivity to sulfites should not consume this product and should return to the product to the place of purchase for a full refund. Consumers with questions should contact the company.

Product: Ice Cream
Incident: Possible Health Risk– Undeclared Allegen

A Ludington, MI firm is recalling their Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Ice Cream because it's ingredients may include an undeclared nut allergen. People who have an allergy or severe sensitivity to nuts run the risk of serious or life-threatening allergic reaction if they consume this product. The recalled products were distributed through a retailer in IL, IN, MI and OH. The recall applies to 1.5 quart containers. None of the other firm's products are affected by the recall. The recall was initiated after receiving two complaints of chocolate covered nuts found in the product and included associated allergic reactions from consumers allergic to nuts. The company is working to determine the type of nut allergen and is conducting an internal audit to determine possible cause. The firm is working to remove the impacted products from store shelves and the entire distribution system. Consumers should return the recalled products for a full refund and contact the company with any further questions.

United States Department of Agriculture Recalls (www.usda.gov)

Product: Chicken Products
Incident: Possible Health Risk–Undeclared Allergen

A Springdale, AR establishment is recalling approximately 29,200 pounds of seasoned raw, chicken breast strips due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen. The products are formulated with soy protein, a known allergen, and monosodium glutamate (MSG). The product was released with a label for boneless skinless breast pieces with rib meat, which does not declare soy or MSG on the label. The products were produced and packaged from Dec. 21 through Dec. 23, 2013 and were sold to distributors in TN and IA for further distribution. The problem was discovered after the company received a customer complaint of incorrectly labeled product. The company's investigation found that the mislabeling occurred when the label was mistakenly applied to allergen containing products packaged nearby. FSIS has not received any reports of illness due to consumption of these products. Consumers with questions should contact the company.

Product: Chicken Noodle Soup (February 2014)
Incident: Possible Health Risk-Undeclared Allergen

A Milton, PA establishment is recalling approximately 54,673 pounds of 14 oz. microwave bowls of chicken noodle soup products due to misbranding and undeclared allergens. The product is formulated with wheat and egg, known allergens, which are not declared on the label. The product was released with a chicken with rice soup label, which does not declare the allergens. The products were produced on December 16, 2013 and shipped to retail outlets nationwide. The problem was reported to the firm by consumers who discovered chicken noodle soup in mislabeled bowls. FSIS and the company have not received any reports of adverse reactions associated with consumption of these products. Media and consumers with questions in regard to the recall should contact the company's consumer hotline number

Consumer Product Safety Commission Recalls (www.cpsc.gov)

Product: Electric Space Heaters
Incident: Possible Risk-Fire and Burn Hazard

A Delray Beach, FL manufacturer is recalling approximately 31,000 units of electric space heaters manufactured in China and sold in black, red and white. The heaters' flame effect resembles a fireplace and works with or without heat. The heater can overheat and cause the units to melt, catch fire and ignite nearby items, posing a fire and burn hazard to consumers. The firm has received 32 reports of heaters burning or melting, including eight reports of the units catching fire, one of which resulted in minor property damage. No injuries have been reported. Customers should immediately turn off and unplug the electric space heater and contact the company for a full refund. The heaters were sold at retailers nationwide and online between August 2013 through January 2014. Consumers with questions should contact the company directly or visit their website for more information.

Product: Grass Trimmers
Incident: Possible Risk-Fire and Burn Hazard

A Norcross, GA importer is recalling approximately 115,000 units of grass trimmers (12,400 units in Canada). The recall involves twelve models of grass trimmers manufactured in China. The gasoline-powered trimmers have either a green or orange engine cover. The grass trimmers can overheat, posing fire and burn hazards to the consumer. The company has not received any reports of incident or injuries related to the use of these products. The grass trimmers were sold at retailers and home improvement and building supply stores nationwide and online from March 2010 through November 2013. Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled grass trimmers and contact the firm for instructions on how to return the product for a free repair. Consumers with questions should contact the company directly or visit their website for additional information.

Crisis Control is a newsletter jointly published by RQA, Inc. & Catlin Group.

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