

Marketing Minute ~

3 Social Media Lessons From The Olympics

Social media gaffes can happen to the best of us. Sometimes even to Olympic athletes.

Once the 2012 Summer Olympics kicked off in London, a small flurry of athletes—among them a Greek triple jumper and a Swiss soccer player—have been cut from their respective teams for sending offensive messages over Twitter.

While an Olympic team doesn't operate exactly like a business, there are some lessons business owners can glean from these social media mistakes and apply to their own marketing efforts. Here are three tips from social media expert Scott Stratten, author and founder of Ontario-based marketing consultancy Un-Marketing.

1. Make it known to employees that social media is not to be taken lightly.

That's not say no one can have fun with social media. But owners and their employees should be aware that what they socialize -- either from the company or, if applicable, from their personal accounts -- is a reflection on your brand.

Stratten suggests creating a list of social media do's and don'ts for employees. "Just realizing that they can change the brand perception with as little as 140 characters will usually make employees think before they tweet," he says. Show both brand home-runs and strike-outs to give employees a frame of reference.



2. Have a human-resources plan for dealing with social media mistakes.

The offending Olympic athletes were promptly expelled from competing for their social media transgressions. A business owner might not fire an employee for a minor misstep on social media, but should know what qualifies as a major mistake and the consequences employees could face if they make one.

Like many management issues, problems should be handled on a case-by-case basis, Stratten says. "Tweeting something mildly insensitive can be one thing, but being [undeniably offensive] is another," he says. Any guidelines in place for governing employee interactions between co-workers or customers should be extended to the virtual world.

3. Act fast to repair the situation online.

Don't wait too long before apologizing or addressing the issue online after the mistake is made. Reaction to social media fallout is measured in hours, not days or weeks, Stratten says.

"[A misstep] needs to be viewed as an opportunity to come out on top, instead of a chance to hide behind a press release," he says. "You can't change the fact that your brand is in the spotlight, but you can control how you react."

Own up to any problem, show remorse and tell everyone what you plan to do or have done. "People are forgiving for the most part, as long as you do it swiftly and authentically," he says.

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Marilyn K. Dayton, Business/Marketing Specialist

<http://www.marketingandbizpro.com> ~ marilyn@marketingandbizpro.com

860-389-2521

