

FOR many public relations (PR) firms, bloggers have become a permanent fixture on guest lists for almost all events – be it a product launch or corporate social responsibility initiative.

The relationship between PR agencies and traditional media is an old routine (honed through decades

of practise) choreographed to a familiar tune.

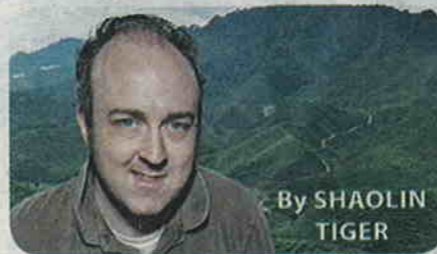
In contrast, the trial and error approach still applies for PR agencies when it comes to engaging with bloggers. Not unlike having to create a dance routine for an experimental new-age rock group.

With anything new and still in its

infancy, there are certainly some growing pains to be expected. Some serious thought and discussion to just what the rules, etiquette and expectations should be in this uncharted territory – is the first step.

In this vein, today's *Cyberspot* presents the (abridged and edited) beginnings of such a conversation:

The problem with PR companies in Malaysia engaging bloggers



By SHAOLIN TIGER

PR companies in general are so far behind the curve when it comes to dealing with blogs and bloggers I think some of them haven't even seen the foothills yet...

Granted there are a few agencies that handle blog related stuff very well (Yay to Text100, even then they aren't 100% on everything – but I'd attribute that to client ideas/requests rather than their lack of tact/skill) and some others that are willing to listen, learn and take action.

I've had good experience so far with Edelman and Fleishman-Hillard who are willing to put in the effort to make sure everyone in the relationship feels fairly treated. And of course the best of all Kim Komm!

After all the main problem is most PR agencies treat us like traditional media, the difference is we don't get a salary, we don't get paid to go to events or paid to write stories.

We generally blog because we want to, if you want us to go to some event and write about it you better pay! Especially if it's not even particularly relevant to what we generally write about.

If you do want us to go and you aren't compensating us for our time and effort, don't expect us to write about it. If it was a good event/product/etc you might get a Tweet dedicated to it – but that's about it.

The problem is compounded by PR agencies telling their clients they don't need to pay people like Nuffnang to run campaigns on blogs because they can get blog coverage for free by inviting the bloggers to 'cool' and 'fun' events and giving them some skanky goodie bag (honestly I don't need another notepad/pen/keychain/laptop case).

You know what is more sickening? Most of the time it works; some bloggers are a desperate bunch and will write about every event they get invited to. Even when it was

boring, irrelevant and no one profited from it.

This dilutes the earning capability bloggers have if companies realise they can get PR companies to engage bloggers without paying.

If you want to treat my blog as a means of advertising, then I am the media owner – respect that. Remember you don't spend huge amounts advertising on my blog (like you do with traditional media) so you have no rights to use it for any kind of leverage.

I don't particularly mean you have to pay me, but if you are offering goods or services at least pay me in kind (at least the value of my advertorial rate, and if it involves working hours – more).

If you want bloggers to attend, don't have events too early especially if the venue is Kuala Lumpur (7pm is too early, 9-10pm is better).

Don't have events on weekday afternoons or mornings – we have jobs.

PR agencies seem to automatically assume every reasonably popular blogger is a 'pro-blogger' or something and we don't need to work – we just sit around at home waiting eagerly for their press

releases and event invites.

It's not like that, and the sooner YOU poorly informed PR hacks educate yourselves the sooner you will reap real benefits from engaging bloggers and forming relationships with them.

Blogs are a powerful platform, but give the blogger some freedom. If you want them to review your product then let them criticise it (even if you paid them to write) – be mature in your approach. Blog readers are a savvy bunch and the net is full of information – ultimately you can't hide the truth.

At the end of the day bloggers are people, generally intelligent people, people who can write, form opinions and elucidate them.

So treat them like that, treat them like someone who is giving you their precious time to listen to what you have to say, treat them with respect and treat their blog with respect.

You wouldn't give your PR services for free, don't expect us to blog for free ok?

• For the full post, head to www.shaolintiger.com/2009/03/27/the-problem-with-pr-public-relations-companies-in-malaysia-engaging-bloggers/



URL: <http://www.shaolintiger.com>

PR people and bloggers: why engage in the first place?

I BELIEVE the crux of the issue is that there is still largely misunderstanding on both sides to this core question: "What's the point of engagement?"

To the PR person:

It's no big secret that more and more clients today are asking agencies about engaging the blogosphere, twit-o-sphere or whatever "sphere" you can think of.

Most clients don't understand social media, and I can't help but think the responsibility falls squarely on the agency to educate them. Both PR people and clients need to understand what social / peer media can and cannot do. Expectations, goals and objectives of any kind of engagement need to be set right.

What's your goal in engaging the blogger? So that they can write a positive "write-up" about your client's products/services? If so, I'd say paying for the advertorial is probably the best way to go.

Let me give you an alternative viewpoint: what if your engagement with the social/peer media isn't so you can see positive blog posts, but so you can involve yourself and your brand in the conversation that's going all around you regardless of whether you take part or not, and add value?

...Social media is about the conversation. Companies can participate, or they can pay some money and take an Ad. Like what an editor once told me.

My humble advice is, don't think the blogger owes you anything just because they attended your event. The onus is on you, the company and the PR person advising the company, to make sure what you've got to tell the blogger is worth the blogger re-telling, if coverage is your goal.

To the blogger:

Here's what PR people can do: pre-release scoops, direct contact with some top people (CEOs?), connect you to in-depth discussions with experts from client companies, get you product samples, previews of upcoming products, and ensure your feedback gets listened to and acted upon.

Here's what PR people don't do (generally): place advertorials or do advertising. This is a function

Getting From Misunderstanding to Common Ground

The relationship between PR professionals and bloggers is a work in progress, though both have much to gain from the relationship.

In early 2007, the Council of Public Relations Firms (CPRF) and APCO Worldwide partnered to learn more about interactions and relationships between public relations (PR) professionals and bloggers. Findings show that PR professionals who understand the blogger "culture" are having more success in communicating in this online channel than those who do not. In fact, bloggers who are engaging with savvy, well-informed communicators have richer material to share with their clients.

How YOU Can Get Involved

- Submit your questions & comments
- Link to this from your blog
- Sign up to receive updates
- Tell others about the study

In early 2007, the Council of Public Relations Firms (CPRF) and APCO Worldwide partnered to learn more about interactions and relationships between public relations (PR) professionals and bloggers. To find out more about this study and their findings, visit www.bloggersandpr.com



By DAVID LIAN

of the media-buying agency, whom the client pays to insert advertisements/advertorials in the right places...

PR people are there to facilitate conversations between a company and its interested audiences...

So what's the root of the problem?

I can't help but think it's the PR community's fault for bringing this upon ourselves in the first place by setting expectations incorrectly when working with the blogosphere.

The key word is to understand. Social media is not as simple as the "one event equals eight write-ups" formula many 'PR' agencies peddle to clients. On second thought, even your traditional media isn't as simple as that. We could all do with a little more thinking, research, and just asking ourselves: "Would I do this to myself if I was on the other end of the stick?"

• For the full post, head to www.davidlian.com/2009/03/pr-people-and-bloggers-why-engage-in.html



URL: <http://www.davidlian.com/>

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