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Live from NEMOA: The Importance of PR

Sherry Chiger

Catalog Age-Lead the Evolution, Mar 25 2004



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Cambridge, MA--Imagine you're a toys cataloger having problems with your distribution center software during the holiday season. Imagine that a number of your orders aren't being shipped--and thanks to the software snafus, you can't ascertain which orders those are. Now imagine that it's two days before Christmas, and one of the customers who hasn't received her order is a television producer in New York, who has called every local media outlet she knows--and being a producer, she knows a lot of them--to tell them about the problem. What do you do?

Public relations veteran Lisa Hahn, president/CEO of Caugherty Hahn Communications, can tell you what she did when this scenario happened to one of her clients. And tell she did, during a Wednesday session at the New England Mail Order Association's spring conference.

As the TV stations contacted her about the story, she made sure to respond promptly, showing up at the studios with plenty of dolls and other toys to show that the cataloger was a legitimate firm with the products on hand. She also explained the company's contingency plans.

Stories about the cataloger's woes did air on one or two New York stations, Hahn said. But fortunately for the company, an even bigger story--about a lifeboat falling off a ship that was docked in a local harbor--bumped the cataloger's tale.

Nonetheless, that example addressed several of Hahn's key points regarding successful PR. When working with the media, she said, "be prepared for the worst possible questions." What's more, "speed counts," so respond to all media requests--good or bad--promptly.

And while silence may be golden in some instances, such is not the case regarding any sort of predicament, crisis, or "smouldering" problem involving your company. "If you're not speaking," Hahn said, "somebody's going to be speaking for you." And you may not like the story that somebody is telling.

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