

Attack from Cyberspace



How to anticipate, and defend
yourself from, attacks on the Internet

In Cyberspace, you are not alone

- The most important new communication medium of our time
 - Global community 100 million+ and growing
 - Over 80,000 Newsgroups; 1,000 new Websites a day, specialized email lists
 - A major research tool for media, activists
- A new reputational battleground
 - issues propagate more quickly, widely
 - gives activists leverage they never had before

The quick and the dead

- Anyone can publish
- Verification not required
- “Local” issues quickly become “global”
- Issues can cross over to mainstream media like viruses can cross between species
- Some Newsgroups are quite influential

Generally, corporations are slow-responders

What kinds of activists use the Internet?

Activists on the Internet run across a spectrum:

Cultists
Paranoids

Single-cause
obsessives, self-
publishers

Sophisticated
manipulators



What's the impact of what is said on the Internet?



Hypothesis: impact is mediated by how the public views the speaker's knowledge and credibility

Your client is most vulnerable if...

- Its products are
 - important to Netizens
 - impact health, safety, environment concerns
- Its stakeholders are Web-literate
- It is rich, powerful, high-profile
- It is a regulated or semi-regulated organization

Score-card to date

- **Minor hits**
 - Gets media coverage; ideas legitimized
 - Advances activists' agenda
- **Major hits**
 - Involve media and politicians (“double play”)
 - Politicians investigate, publicize, pass laws
 - Media and politicians feed each other

Minor hits

- The following cases swayed corporate reputation at least a little:
 - Freeport Mcmoran Mining in Indonesia
 - media became conscious of human rights record
 - Calvin Klein
 - cultural critics of advertising gained focal point
 - TWA Flight 800
 - mainstream media reported “conspiracy”
 - McDonalds
 - legal action against British activists spawned health / environment copycats

Major hits

- The following cases induced major changes in corporate policy or behavior:
 - Intel
 - Pentium chip recall
 - Altavista Mutual Funds
 - Collapse of new fund; Veronika Hirsch fired
 - Odwalla Beverages
 - Turned recall into full-scale crisis

Principles of successful defense

- The basics of effective reputation defence on the Internet are these:
 - Monitor continually
 - Accelerate your reaction-time
 - Build a full response toolkit

Monitor continually

- Use search engines to get on top of what's being said about your client
 - Media, activists use them; you should, too
 - Search Websites and Newsgroups
 - Use DejaNews for contributor data
- Build a profile of your issues and your activists (including links)

Accelerate your reaction time

- Basic issue: respond before “critical mass” is reached
- In order to ensure this:
 - Construct crisis scenarios
 - Develop preparedness plan
 - Test with simulations
 - Identify your weaknesses

Build a better response toolkit

- Build a “threat index”
 - What issues would sway public the most?
 - Who would be your most dangerous critics?
- Tailor strategies to the audience:
 - With consumers: make love, not war
 - With truth-seekers: dialogue
 - With hard-core critics: reason with the jury, not the D.A.
 - Always line up third-party allies

Defend yourself on all fronts

- Cyberspace is only one battleground
 - Watch out for issues crossing over into mainstream news media
- Stay focussed on your key audiences
 - Media
 - Shareholders
 - Employees
 - Local communities
- What are they hearing? What do they believe?

Issues for think about

- How can you learn more about the demographics of your Net audience?
- How to be effective while respecting the Net culture?
 - sending email to individual critics may provoke paranoia
- When (and if) to call the lawyers?
 - avoid becoming “Goliath” and creating martyrs