

Session: “The Future of Social Media” Stephen Waddington

ICCO Summit: The PR industry needs to claim its ground

In his session, Speed’s Stephen Waddington explored the emergence of social media and the opportunity it provides for the PR industry and argued that the future of PR is the future of social media.

In time I think that we’ll come to recognise the development of the Internet at the turn of the 21st century to be as radical to society as the invention of the printing press in the second half of the 15th century. That’s incredibly exciting for anyone working in the PR or the media but it’s also incredibly daunting.

Powerful individuals and journalists have always had a platform to share their views of course. But now social media means that anyone can demand “do you know who I am?” of a brand. It’s made the whole area of reputation management much more complicated, not least because there is so much more to manage now.

There are two possible reactions to social media within an organisation: social media as bolt-on channel; or as a strategic platform for customer engagement.

In using social media as a bolt-on channel, an organisation transfers the communication techniques that it has used with its traditional audiences, typically the media, and supplements them with a sprinkling of social media. You can spot these organisations everyday on Facebook or Twitter spewing out content with little or no engagement.

In contrast the strategic approach to social media recognises the opportunity that it offers a business to put its customers at its heart.

There’s a turf war going on, no doubt. PR agencies are competing with ad agencies and digital agencies for budgets. It is time for the industry to stand up and be counted. Otherwise we’ll almost certainly lose out as we did with search marketing.

The identification of a community and development of content to engage with that community in a participative relationship, whatever the media, is an editorial process.

This is the PR industry’s ground. We need to claim it.

Read more on [Stephen’s blog](#).