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CORPORATE HUMOR

Context is Key



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COVER IMAGE: People of all ages and cultures respond to humour. The majority of people are able to experience humour, i.e., to be amused, to laugh or smile at something funny, and thus they are considered to have a sense of humour. The hypothetical person lacking a sense of humour would likely find the behaviour induced by humour to be inexplicable, strange, or even irrational. Though ultimately decided by personal taste, the extent to which a person will find something humorous depends upon a host of variables, including geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education, intelligence and context.

Corporate Humor

Context is Key

Mikah Sellers

Originally Published on LEVICK Daily





Let's face it, 99 percent of corporate videos are unbearably boring. Whether it's an internal training device or an external piece aimed at personalizing an organization and its people, most companies err on the side of caution when drafting the script, selecting their spokespeople, or choosing locations and backdrops. They rarely step outside of the bounds of what is "safe" or "comfortable." As a result, they are often left with footage that makes *Ishtar* look like *Citizen Kane*. The product is safe; but safe doesn't get you noticed—especially amid all competing content that clutters the online space.

That's likely why we are seeing more and more organizations beginning to exercise a sense of humor when it comes to Web video. As is the case with other forms of corporate communication, there are examples to emulate and cautionary tales alike; but those that get it right often provide themselves a powerful tool for telling their stories, driving brand engagement, and recruiting the talent they need to execute their strategy and operations.

There are, of course, risks when companies try to be funny—and many of them extend further than that sinking feeling that accompanies the

sound of crickets chirping. As such, they need to ask themselves the right questions before letting the hilarity ensue. Is there a chance we could offend our audience or create negative backlash? Will our audience get it? Is this just humor for humor's sake, or does it reflect our core values? What does the joke say about our brand?

Some organizations take the time to consider these questions—and, unfortunately, some do not.

Take, for example, the Kixeye recruiting video "The Interview." The piece is silly, irreverent, and laced with profanity. To some, it clearly crosses the line between what's acceptable and what's inappropriate in the corporate context; but I would be surprised if any of those would-be critics fall within the video's target audience of 20-30-year-old video game developers. Kixeye considered its audience before unleashing the funny. As a result, its message achieves the dual goals of not only resonating with the fun-loving people Kixeye is trying to reach; but gaining the viral visibility all Web videos ultimately covet.

For Kixeye this video works. For Barclays or McKinsey, it most certainly would not. As such, we learn the valuable lesson that context is absolutely critical.

Now, let's look at a video produced by LocumTenens.com, a physician recruiting agency that pairs doctors with communities in which they want to work. "The Agent" employs the same irreverent tone as the Kixeye video mentioned

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above—but the audience isn't hip young video game developers; it's buttoned up doctors who are likely looking for a little more professionalism from those with which they would entrust their careers. The video is funny; but funny is not an objective in and of itself. The humor has to serve a higher purpose. Here, it undercuts the underlying message rather than reinforce it. In the end, it seems that LocumTenens.com forgot the cardinal rule that context is key.

Every organization takes a chance when donning a clown suit; but the rewards can be well worth the risk when companies take the time to carefully weigh how—and if—humor can positively impact their brands. As Winston Churchill famously said "a joke is a very serious thing." In the corporate context, truer words have never been spoken. ■

Mikah Sellers is the Vice President of Marketing at LEVICK and a contributing author to LEVICK Daily.

Cyber Security

with Christopher Garcia



In this LEVICK Daily video interview, we discuss cyber security with Christopher Garcia, a partner in the securities litigation practice at Weil Gotshal & Manges, LLP. Amid an epidemic of data loss and theft, companies need to consider the full spectrum of threats and total array of options available to mitigate them. Routine security assessments are a must. Equally important is the need to demonstrate that data protection is a top priority throughout the organization.

Technology's Impact on Reputation



Originally Published on Civiliation.org

In a recent feature interview with CiviliNation, LEVICK's Vice President of Marketing, Mikah Sellers, shared myriad insights into the ways that social and digital media have fundamentally altered the practice of reputation management. Mr. Sellers serves as an advisor to CiviliNation alongside industry luminaries such as Jimmy Wales and Arthur Bushkin. At a time when there is a digital aspect to every communications challenge and opportunity, he discusses the strategies and best practices that help companies, organizations, and individuals create, manage, and protect stellar online brands.



Mikah Sellers is a marketing executive with 10+ years experience at the intersection of marketing and technology. He currently serves as the Vice President of Marketing for LEVICK, a leading public relations firm headquartered in Washington, D.C.

Prior to joining LEVICK he held a variety of marketing, leadership and consulting roles at ePartners and Doceus, where he worked on high-profile projects for Fortune 1000 and non-profit clients including Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Maggie

Moos International, Schlotzskys, the Chamber of Commerce, and Magazine Publishers of America, to name a few. Mikah also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University, where he teaches in the Master of Professional Studies in the Technology Management program.

Mikah earned an M.B.A. and an M.A. in Communication Arts with a focus in advertising and public relations both with distinction at the New York Institute of Technology. Sellers also earned an M.S. in Internet Marketing at Full Sail University. He has also completed graduate coursework at Gonzaga University in organizational leadership, conflict resolution and human relations.

CiviliNation: You're the Vice President of Marketing at LEVICK, a public relations firm located in Washington D.C. and New York City. Based on your experience, has technology increased the number and severity of reputational attacks against companies and organizations?

Mikah Sellers: Technology has made it far easier to attack someone with relative anonymity, and to inflict massive damage in a very short period of time. In the past, if you were the victim of an act of libel or slander it was pretty easy to track down the source and ultimately clear your name.

Today a tweet goes global in seconds, blog posts are reposted, shared, liked, favorited in minutes. Content spreads virally so fast that it is virtually impossible to completely contain it even if you're an expert in digital and social media.

CiviliNation: What is your response to people who claim that online reputational and privacy attacks against adults are rare and not something that most people need to worry about?

Mikah Sellers: They are living in a fantasy land. The relative anonymity that the Internet pro-

BLOGS *worth following*



vides makes it easy for someone that is jealous, angry, or infatuated to create havoc in your life in a matter of moments. Repairing that damage could take years and cost a small fortune.

CiviliNation: Do you believe that social networking and other websites have any social or ethical responsibilities to help stem privacy violations and online attacks?

Mikah Sellers: No. Facebook has recently been a part of a number of controversies surrounding cyber-bullying and reputational attacks. Social networks need to craft terms of use agreements based on common sense and values that protect 99.99% of their users, not the .01% of cyber-predators that rely on first amendment arguments to protect their ill-advised actions.

CiviliNation: Why do you think there is a frequent lack of understanding by law enforcement and the legal system about the depth and breadth of the problem of online attacks and cyber bullying against adults?

Mikah Sellers: The simple fact of the matter is that the law has not yet caught up with societal or technological changes. There is a real urgent need for the highest courts to review our laws and reflect on these new forms of media.

CiviliNation: What role do you believe the law should play in helping reduce online attacks and privacy violations?

Mikah Sellers: If there was less ambiguity around the laws governing online behavior and stricter enforcement of existing (or future)

laws people would think twice about their actions. I also feel that our current system of laws does not account for cross-border issues; many reputational attacks have an international component to them in terms of prosecution. Once it is determined that something took place offshore prosecution becomes increasingly more complex if not impossible.

CiviliNation: What three recommendations would you give companies and people to help protect themselves online?

Mikah Sellers: First and foremost, set up some form of monitoring even if it's just Google Alerts. If you're attacked online respond after careful thought and consideration—never in the heat of the moment when you're angry—always enlist a sounding board to make sure your response is measured. Put strategy before tactics—carefully plot out your strategy and supporting tactics and recruit third-party allies in advance. Be prepared before you launch any counter-offensive. Don't fall into the trap of acting like your attacker. Calm, cool and collected wins the day. **L**

CALM, COOL
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THOUGHT LEADERS

Amber Naslund

brasstackthinking.com

Amber Naslund is a coauthor of *The Now Revolution*. The book discusses the impact of the social web and how businesses need to “adapt to the new era of instantaneous business.”

Brian Halligan

hubspot.com/company/management/brian-halligan
HubSpot CEO and Founder.

Chris Brogan

chrisbrogan.com

Chris Brogan is an American author, journalist, marketing consultant, and frequent speaker about social media marketing.

David Meerman Scott

davidmeermanscott.com

David Meerman Scott is an American online marketing strategist, and author of several books on marketing, most notably *The New Rules of Marketing and PR* with over 250,000 copies in print in more than 25 languages.

Guy Kawasaki

guykawasaki.com

Guy Kawasaki is a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, bestselling author, and Apple Fellow. He was one of the Apple employees originally responsible for marketing the Macintosh in 1984.

Jay Baer

jaybaer.com

Jay Baer is coauthor of, “*The Now Revolution: 7 Shifts to Make Your Business Faster, Smarter and More Social.*”

Rachel Botsman

rachelbotsman.com

Rachel Botsman is a social innovator who writes, consults and speaks on the power of collaboration and sharing through network technologies.

Seth Godin

sethgodin.typepad.com

Seth Godin is an American entrepreneur, author and public speaker. Godin popularized the topic of permission marketing.

INDUSTRY BLOGS

Holmes Report

holmesreport.com

A source of news, knowledge, and career information for public relations professionals.

NACD Blog

blog.nacdonline.org

The National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) blog provides insight on corporate governance and leading board practices.

PR Week

prweekus.com

PRWeek is a vital part of the PR and communications industries in the US, providing timely news, reviews, profiles, techniques, and ground-breaking research.

PR Daily News

prdaily.com

PR Daily provides public relations professionals, social media specialists and marketing communicators with a daily news feed.

BUSINESS RELATED

FastCompany

fastcompany.com

Fast Company is the world's leading progressive business media brand, with a unique editorial focus on business, design, and technology.

Forbes

forbes.com

Forbes is a leading source for reliable business news and financial information for the World's business leaders.

Mashable

mashable.com

Social Media news blog covering cool new websites and social networks.

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IN THE NEWS

■ ARTICLES

New York Post | MARCH 7, 2013

Dell Pool Gets Crowded as Icahn, Others Dive In

Bloomberg News | MARCH 6, 2013

Apple CEO to Face Investors Seeking More of Cash Hoard

**THE URGENCY
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