

PRWeek

OP-ED

Blog pitches entail research, restraint

Public relations was a hot topic in San Francisco at the annual BlogHer conference, held from July 18-19, hosted by the number-one community for blogs by women. During one session about Mommy Blogging, some bloggers insisted that authenticity could not survive if PR people trespassed on their turf, while, in another, a more girl power-oriented group gave kudos to anyone who could monetize successfully while maintaining their authentic voice.

What's a PR pro to do? The tech bloggers at MobHappy.com propose a traffic-light symbol on landing pages: red means "No PR," green is "PR is OK," etc.

Here's a different approach – let's earn our welcome. To earn trust, we must play by the rules. Here are a few that came from BlogHer:

Don't write in someone else's diary. When it comes to Mommy Blogs, some, like Mom101 and Dooce, are in diary form, existing simply to share their authors' lives. Posting about Bugaboo strollers being too expensive is cool. PR people are not. Blogs like 5 Minutes for Mom and Mommy Track'd are akin to Web sites – offering giveaways, product reviews, and in-depth feature stories. Pitch them

without fear.

Think this distinction doesn't matter? Pitch where it's not wanted, then run for cover. Your name, credibility, and authenticity are everything. Protect them by respecting the ground rules of this community of influencers who are working hard to preserve their voice.

Avoid pitching Easter stories to a Jewish blogger (true story for Devra from Mommy Guilt). In other words, take time to customize pitches. PR manag-

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ers should stop having neophytes draft one-size-fits-all-pitches to get some "new media" hits.

You have to be one to pitch one. Identifying with and participating in a blog is a prerequisite for pitching. I'm a mom; this gives me the right to rave about products that are great for moms (and rant about

sleepless nights and too much work). A 20-year-old hipster with cool hair is not credible here.

With great responsibility comes great risk, warned Splinter from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Johnson's Baby invited mom bloggers to Baby Camp, but the brand enforced a no-kids-allowed rule. The diapers hit the fan. Google "Johnson's Baby Camp" to see the outrage. The ridicule is unfair, but so is the playground.

Having an open mind leads to opportunity. When GM offered five bloggers from the Silicon Valley Moms group a Chevy Tahoe Hybrid SUV to travel to BlogHer '08, they gladly accepted. Why? GM said they wouldn't censor the group's blog posts.

The authenticity that makes blogs appealing can be preserved, but it's a shared responsibility. Bloggers should ask themselves, "Why am I doing this?" and PR pros should shape their actions to respect the values of these communities. ■

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PASSION AND PRECISION IN COMMUNICATION

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