

TO SPEAK OUT OR NOT TO SPEAK OUT?

That is the question

Businesses today are grappling with whether they need to take a stand. Stakeholders are increasingly looking to brands to express their opinions or positions on political or social issues even when the topics are unrelated to their core business. Expressing a point of view publicly, however, risks a backlash from opponents. With a contentious election looming in 2020, this dynamic will likely only intensify.

If consumers, employees and investors have different views, all varying in intensity and potential controversy, should a company act? Must it take and communicate a position? Can it communicate about the news of the day? Research consistently shows that the answer is yes.

As a global communications consultancy, Ketchum helps companies protect corporate reputations and enable communications in today's fractious, hyper-partisan landscape. Grounding our approach in research and deep experience in issues management, purpose and public affairs, we help clients develop a point of view on politically-charged issues and determine how to respond (or not).

This methodology, *Stand Up/Speak Out?*, gives companies a plan with the tools to evaluate the complexities of the political-cultural environment and to take the right steps to engage with stakeholders meaningfully while mitigating reputational risks.



Ketchum

Our Approach



UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS

Companies must first ask whether their stakeholders expect or want them to take a position on an issue, as well as whether their stance will be perceived as authentic and/or impactful. We conduct stakeholder research that will inform what audiences think of the company, what they care about and how credible they view the company on targeted issues, among other important questions.



REPUTATION BY PERMISSION

Ketchum saw the shift in stakeholder expectations happening years ago – that companies must view themselves serving at the pleasure of the people – and developed a philosophy and framework to craft better corporate communications. Companies need to ask: do they have the “permission” to engage on the issue/topic? If not, how do they begin to earn it? We use this perspective to develop a strategic approach to your organization’s narrative on key issues – weighing factors such as the company’s business objectives, history, culture, purpose platform, etc.



ASSESS BENEFITS AND RISKS

Political debates by definition have advocates and detractors on both sides – pleasing one audience almost certainly means upsetting another. We assess issues and potential positions to determine the benefits of weighing in (talent retention, market differentiation, etc.) versus the risks (customer boycotts, shareholder concerns, etc.).



DEVELOP PLATFORMS

Using our analysis, we develop position platforms that define the topics and situations on which the company would want to communicate, and that are consistent with its mission, values and purpose. These platforms outline the range of relevant issues, the potential events that could trigger a response, what the company would say and the channels where it would say it.



BUILD A PLAN

We package a company’s issues platforms within a comprehensive playbook to guide its responses on the events of the day. We build assessment tools that evaluate current events in real time using pre-determined criteria to help with decision making. The plan also contains protocols to:

- Identify issues/events for response
- Escalate and align on potential response moments
- Evaluate the importance to stakeholders and associated risk
- Provide direction on stakeholder response (employee email, statement, social media post)
- Establish issue-specific direction for response to particular issues/events
- Create contingencies and response scenarios for potential backlash

We can help you use your voice wisely. Contact us to get your analysis started today.

ANDREW MOESEL
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
ISSUES & CRISIS MANAGEMENT
ANDREW.MOESEL@KETCHUM.COM
+1 646 935 3988

JOHN BRADBURY
PARTNER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR
GLOBAL ISSUES & CRISIS MANAGEMENT
JOHN.BRADBURY@KETCHUM.COM
+1 646 935 4023

Ketchum.com

COPYRIGHT © 2019 KETCHUM INC.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Ketchum