

## Public Relations in 2009 - The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

*Infinity Communications' guide to the best and worst Canadian PR moments of 2009*

(FV Newswire) February 09, 2010 -- 2009 was a busy year for Canadian public relations professionals and media alike as flu epidemics, political turmoil, strikes and celebrity scandals gripped the country. From a communications perspective, some of these incidents were handled well and some were handled... not so well. Here is the Infinity Communications guide to the most important PR moments of 2009:

### The Good

AshleyMadison.com - Why pay for advertising when you can get it for free?

PR Brilliance Rating:\*\*\*\*\*

(\*Disclaimer\* The following comments are purely based on PR analysis and do not condone the views of AshleyMadison.com in any way)

The most ingenious publicity stunt of the year award has to go to the Ashley Madison agency for their bid to wrap 10 Toronto street cars with ads declaring "Life is short... have an affair!" The inevitable rejection from the Toronto Transit Commission ad review committee did not dampen the surge of media attention for the adulterous dating service, as people across the country debated the ethics of their scandalous messaging.

Coming hot on the heels of Ashley Madison's proposed \$5 million sponsorship deal with Tiger Woods to be the new face of their website (knowing he would not accept), this clever PR move was a stroke of brilliance for the Canadian company.

Justin Bieber – Harnessing the extraordinary power of social media

PR Brilliance Rating:\*\*\*\*

Justin Bieber is a tween pop sensation who exploded onto the music scene this year, taking the 2009 charts by storm and stealing the hearts of young girls across North America. The 15 year-old singer from Stratford, Ontario was discovered by R&B star Usher when Justin's mom began posting homemade YouTube videos of his songs.

In just one year, Bieber catapulted from local YouTube star to platinum-selling recording artist, becoming a textbook example of how social media has rapidly changed the face of the entertainment industry.

Roy Halliday – A simple "thank you" goes a long way

PR Brilliance Rating\*\*\*

When Toronto Blue Jays' beloved pitcher Roy Halladay announced last summer that he was shopping around for a new contract, he was in danger of the Vince Carter effect... being booed at every Toronto game for the rest of his career. In fact, Halladay's trade to the Phillies in December was a very smooth transition for the player due to his graceful PR skills.

Halladay's open letter in the Toronto Sun thanking the city of Toronto and his faithful fans upheld his excellent reputation and allowed him to move on with style and class.

### The Bad

H1N1 – Crisis communications 101

PR Blunder Rating:\*\*\*\*\*

Not surprisingly, H1N1 was voted the top news story of 2009. Lack of effective communication from Canada's public health authorities allowed rumours to run wild, creating a mass hysteria that erupted at warp speed. People were confused and did not know whom to trust as information changed every day.

In crisis communications, "now" is too late. The most important thing is to plan and be prepared for emergency situations. Transparency and consistent, clear messaging from one trusted spokesperson would have helped to dispel the widespread fear and panic caused by the H1N1 outbreak.

National Post Twitter Show Down – Think before you speak!

PR Blunder Rating:\*\*\*

2009 was the year of a new phenomenon in the realm of cyber bullying... Twitter fights. The world was watching as insults spurred between politicians, journalists and celebrities in the most public and humiliating way. The most notable Canadian Twitter tussle involved a National Post technology reporter (who should know better!) and a marketing professional who was advising him on a story that turned sour. The resulting barrage of profanities and Twitter hate from the reporter became a PR disaster for the National Post, who actually handled the situation beautifully by issuing a formal apology on his behalf.

Twitter is like shouting down a hallway... everyone can hear you! This incident highlights the need for organizations to start adopting social media policies for employees. Presumably, the National Post got on that tout de suite.

### The Ugly

We can't discuss the PR blunders of 2009 without a special mention to some of our American friends, who managed to expertly destroy their reputations this year. Here are the top contenders:

1. Tiger Woods and his cone of silence.
2. John Gosselin and his cheating ways and lack of decorum.
3. Balloon Boy, or rather, "garage boy," and his media-hungry father.
4. Octo-mom – What can we say about Nadya Suleman that hasn't been said already?

Infinity Communications Inc.  
Leanne Bucaro  
905-257-5555