



MENU

:

Home / Blog / The Whole Truth: 4 steps to protect corporate reputation from fake news

The Whole Truth: 4 steps to protect corporate reputation from fake news

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The use of the term ‘fake news’, the dissemination of disinformation and hoaxes under the guise of legitimate factual reporting, has become something of a fad after it became a major feature of last year’s U.S. presidential election. False or misleading stories about the candidates that were widely shared online could very well have swayed the election in Trump’s favour. Indeed, some fake news

postings received more clicks and social media 'likes' than stories from legitimate sources such as the New York Times, demonstrating how damaging such stories can be in the context of modern social media.

From trained Russian operatives to Macedonian teenagers to young Americans themselves— individuals and groups have taken advantage of the breadth of social media to flood the internet with false or misleading information. Often the motive is financial, as Google and Facebook pay out advertising revenues to publishers based on the number of clicks they receive. But there are also more insidious motives, with fake news being used to manipulate the public.

But why does fake news matter for corporate reputation? The problem comes down to trust, with false and misleading information undermining efforts by companies to engage with and build trusting relationships with stakeholders.

While practical jokes, such as the 'dreamer day' hoax aimed at Starbucks, may create short term headaches, it's the more insidious use of false and misleading information as propaganda to promote 'post-factual' political ideologies or conspiracy theories that presents a major risk to corporate reputation.

Last year, Monsanto fell victim to a spurious report by a group of doctors in Argentina which falsely linked the Zika crisis to the company. Similarly, the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries are in a constant battle against the anti-vaccination movement which all started from a research report that has since been widely discredited. And of course, climate change denial, which is the official policy of the party currently holding power in America, is forcing American corporations to take political sides to remain true to their values and protect their reputations.

But what can be done to navigate through the media of make believe? We spoke with Caroline Skipsey, Senior Client Strategist here at Polecat, about how corporations can protect their reputations from fake news. Here are four suggestions:

1. **Understand and learn** from the sources that spread misinformation, they often run very effective digital campaigns that target the consumers or stakeholders that a company is also trying to communicate with.
2. Proactively **link to authoritative or reliable sources of content** from your own online channels. Work to create effective partnerships with trusted content sources and promote their publications.
3. **Address the mistruths** and create engaging content that clearly answers stakeholder's questions related to false information.
4. **Report misinformation.** Wikipedia has an army of vigilant editors who question virtually every post, and universities across the globe have been using the peer review process for generations. This will ensure that your sources and content maintain a high standard of accuracy.

Of course, putting these suggestions into practice will be a challenge for organisations of any size. It's difficult to know what fake news stories are out there competing for your stakeholder's attention alongside your own content. Fortunately, new digital listening [technology](#), leveraged by machine learning and human insights, can efficiently analyse and identify fake news stories and separate them from legitimate postings, empowering you to separate fact from fiction and communicate with a clear and concise voice.

The age of social media is transforming the ways that businesses engage and communicate externally. While many companies are

seizing on this new mode of communication to discover new and exciting opportunities it is also important to understand and proactively address the unique challenges and risks it creates. Fortunately, with the right strategy and tools, companies can take control and be a beacon of truth amidst a sea of lies.



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