#SOCIAL SURVIVAL MANIFESTO

WARNING ON REPUTATION CRISIS FROM AN EX DIGITAL ACTIVIST

Featuring commentary from global leaders in PR, Corporate Affairs and Crisis Communications!

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## Reactions

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WHO AM I TO SAY?

TOM LIACAS

Years ago, I was an activist getting gassed in protests and generally making life difficult for corporations through various media. I remain an unrepentant idealist.

In more recent times, like the hacker turned security expert, I have made myself useful to the very same corporations I used to challenge.

I have personally sold, planned and executed millions of dollars’ worth of social media strategy for blue chip clients. I have worked with the pharmaceutical industry, the oil and gas industry and some of the world’s most vilified brands, helping them use social media to engage with stakeholders over some very controversial projects.
I understand perfectly what online advocates want and how they will go about getting their way. I also know how hard it is for the corporate world to adapt to this new balance of power.

I’m here to help those who will listen with the difficult business of transitioning into this new world, as a question of survival.

I’m going to be harsh in the next few pages but, really, it’s for your own good.
PREAMBLE

Gone are the days when you could broadcast your persuasive messaging to millions and be more or less trusted. The multitudes have created new media in their image and they now have the power.

To survive, you are called upon to change your behavior. Avoid this and you are counting the days until you will be roasted on the fire pit of a reputation crisis.

Citizens, consumers and advocates of the 21st century are drunk with their new power and eager to use it. Social media accords your opponents more credibility and allows them to mobilize faster than you, if you remain reactive.

Afraid? Good. Now you have the motivation to start making the deep changes to corporate communications culture required of a company that wants to survive the social media revolution and come out swinging.
Introduction

INSTRUCTIONS

**Survival**
Understand and apply the first five principles and you may be permitted to survive more or less unscathed.

**Success**
Take on the last five, and you will thrive, surpassing your competitors and benefiting from the sea change taking place.

The points that follow are laid out simply with minimal explanation. Over time, I will treat each principle in detail on my blog at: [www.socialdisruptions.com](http://www.socialdisruptions.com)

Subscribe and stay tuned.
CHAPTER 1

PRINCIPLES FOR SURVIVAL
Chapter 1

Principles for survival

1. HIDING IS NOT AN OPTION!

Whether you like it or not, people out there on social media are talking about you, reading about you and making up their minds about you.

In fact, your brand or industry will soon become a very hot topic, if crisis arises, entirely without your input. If you are not part of those conversations, guess who’s in charge of public perception and brand reputation? The consumers you have angered, your competitors and the activists that hate you.

Trust me, those with a bone to pick are those who will speak the most. Continue to hide and you will most definitely be a ripe target with all the odds stacked against you. Begin participating in the conversation and you may just have a chance to influence the many stories being told about you.
2. **FACE IT, YOU ARE OUTNUMBERED**

Social media is a peer to peer environment and your outfit, no matter how many employees it has, or how great its brand equity, will be treated and judged as a common mortal.

Your peers online, though everyday people to you, realize that they have the numbers and therefore the power, to hurt you if you do not humbly accept your role in this pecking order.

This means that you must stop behaving like the behemoth that you are, and take on the modesty of respecting every single account that interacts with you.

Sorry, that’s just the way it is.
3. YOU NO LONGER CONTROL THE MESSAGE

This new world is collaborative. People like to take part in creating things online. Otherwise, they do not feel engaged and respected. Shove a message down their throats and they will rebel.

If you start a conversation on social media, be prepared for it to drift in directions that you did not foresee. You must be ok with this. In fact, the message, as you conceived it, will be shaped and distorted in light of the concerns of your audience - your consumers, competitors and the advocates who have issues to take up with you.

Your best bet here is to do some intense listening to existing social media conversations out there before you cook up your brand message. The more your message moves in the direction of existing conversations, the better it will be received as stated.
4. TRY ACTING LIKE... A HUMAN BEING

As stated earlier, you’re a mere mortal now. On social media, the multitudes will scrutinize your behavior and judge you by your personality traits.

What’s your online personality? Are you sensitive to the needs and feelings of others or are you a psychopath who lurks in conversations waiting for a chance to boast, to sell your wares or overpower your peers? Are you asking and answering questions, or are you a robot who can just emit unidirectional utterances? Do you think of something worthwhile to contribute to a conversation or are you an airhead that just shares platitudes or comments on the weather?

Imagine your corporate account as a human and ask yourself, would you ‘friend’ this person? If the answer is no, you are building up a club of haters who will happily slam you publicly some day...
5. LEARN TO LISTEN, OR ELSE

Your detractors online presuppose that you don’t listen to them and that, if you did, you would not give a rat’s ass for what they think. Is this true?

If you are not listening to what others are saying, you have no right to participate in online discussions, even if they concern you. Listening is the entry pass to this new world and it is non-negotiable.

Have you ever really listened to your consumers and stakeholders? By this I mean not listening with the goal of defending against what they have to say but listening as though there were hidden gems in every comment sent to you, just waiting to be discovered.

Dig in and try it. Not only will this kind of listening bring greater empathy and help you better leverage your messaging, you might actually learn something about how to improve your product or business practices!
Chapter 2

Principles for success

6. ADMIT THAT YOU DON’T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

As counter-intuitive as it may sound, vulnerability is a strength in networked society. Authenticity has enormous power on this new medium and nothing wins you points faster than admitting weakness and asking for help.

This was a big no-no before and I know it will be hard to swallow but, if you do it right, you will gain strategic advantage as your former detractors become solution finders with you.

More and more of the word’s corporate giants are trying on humility for size and admitting that they don’t have all the answers. By doing so, they are winning the hearts and minds of those who listen. Don’t be left out of this.
7. **SPEAK PLAINLY AND SEEK TO INFORM**

The age of the clever one liner is over. As stated earlier, authenticity is where it’s at on social media. Retire your copywriters and take a stab at presenting things clearly with little or no embellishment.

People now scan for information and use different sources to make their minds up about you. They are also scanning for credibility with a sensitive BS meter on alert.

Lay out the facts and you will be taken seriously. Lay on the charm and you will be the sleazy uncle that everyone avoids at family gatherings.
8. QUIT BEING A MONOLITH

If your company has but a single voice online to represent all of its execs and employees, you are not capitalizing on some very important online resources, especially in times of crisis.

The more ambassadors you have representing your interests from the inside and adding the color of their own knowledge to the brand experience, the more influential you will be in the social sphere.

When people turn the heat on you, your online ambassadors will be your first line of defence and will multiply the avenues available to you for getting your side of the story out there.

Sure, this is a control issue but what isn’t? If there are members of your team that are so proud of the company that they would associate their social accounts with it, then you would be foolish not to empower them.

Giving more of your employees a voice will shore up your defences
9. TRY BEING LESS EVIL

Now we’re coming to the core of things. I’ll be the first to admit that no communications strategy, no matter how well it is conceived, can protect from reputation risks if you have major skeletons in your closet. There’s no hiding dirty truths anymore if you are a social or environmental villain.

If you’re less than perfect, be upfront about it and let people know what you are doing to fix the issues. Maybe they will want to help.

By addressing your flaws, you will certainly pre-empt their ‘outing’ by pressure groups and be more in charge of the solution-finding process.
10. PAY IT FORWARD, NOW

When it comes to influence, networked society is running a ‘gift economy’. Simply put: Share value with the network and you will gain in relevance and goodwill, which can pay off in many ways.

How can your business give something that people need, or solve a problem they have, without asking for anything in return (at first)? Think about this. It can come in the form of soft goods such as information, software or just making strategic connections between the right people.

By the way, this is Google’s business model and they do not seem to be doing poorly at all. Start listening to what your stakeholders need and prepare your gifts accordingly.
REACTIONS
“The Social Survival Manifesto contains incredibly accurate and essential recommendations to stay alive in a connected and always-on world.

Organizations are over-exposed, social media users are following them, so this will mechanically raise the level or vulnerability for brands, organizations and personalities. The growing volume of conversations will transform consumers into activists that will flag issues and concerns at an impressive speed. Markets will become battlegrounds where every organization will have to deal with potential crisis situations.

Even if social media has changed public relations like never before, it’s important to take a serene
and pragmatic look at what is going on. And this is precisely what the manifesto written by Tom brings us.

Beyond dangers and risk, we are lucky enough to be dealing with fantastic new opportunities – as well as immense challenges – and to be at the forefront of major changes in the communication area. We will be able to handle it if we are open enough to learn and humble enough to re-consider what we used to believe were unchangeable habits.”
“The key to keeping stakeholders' trust and confidence in a crisis is to show you care, and to do it early — before others can paint you as uncaring.

But for this to work a company and its leaders really do need to care, and to do and say the things that demonstrate that they care. Most companies eventually come around to doing those things anyway, but way too late — and by then people don't really believe you care. Better to take the pain early, when it can do the most good, and do and say that which shows you care.

Tom's Manifesto is a proven playbook on showing you care and getting the word out in ways that work.”
“Anyone who thinks that they can make up a message and unilaterally push it out in a world of social needs a harsh wake up call.

In my experience as an early adopter of corporate social media, raw facts, transparency and a willingness to engage in social conversations are critical to maintain, protect and respond to potential attacks on corporate reputation today.

Tom’s formula contains all the right ingredients for successfully managing corporate reputation in the 21st century.”
Let's keep this discussion going through the following channels:

**SocialDisruptions.com**
Where the principles of the Manifesto will be presented for discussion.

**SSMlist.SocialDisruptions.com**
Email discussion list for weekly Manifesto updates.

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