
The Morning Risk Report: Business Offers Blueprint to Improve Law Enforcement Optics

By BEN DIPIETRO

A group of reputation-management experts has banded together to create a program to help law enforcement agencies better manage their social media engagement and improve their perceptions with people and within communities. The so-called “Coptics” program developed by the Hetty Group draws from best practices employed by large companies that already have seen the value in being active members of social media to tell their stories and address issues that if not handled properly could blow up into big controversies, said Florence Chung, founder of the Hetty Group. “We believe that if you aren’t telling your story, the world will,” said Ms. Chung. “And the world often doesn’t know the facts.”

Shannon Wilkinson, chief executive of reputation-management firm Reputation Communications, said that although many people in law enforcement have stayed away from social media out of fear or because they prefer to stay out of the spotlight, doing so only cedes the conversation to their critics and others who aren’t representing their viewpoints. For law enforcement agencies or companies wanting to get more active in social media, Ms. Wilkinson said they need to ask themselves two questions: “How do we want to be perceived and by what audience? And how are we currently perceived and by whom?”

Bill Carmody, a digital marketing expert and chief executive of the firm Treport, said by teaching law enforcement how to be part of the digital conversation, and giving them tools to properly engage their audiences, will allow for departments to get involved in discussions before they go viral. Through better engagement, when incidents do occur, law enforcement will be in a better position to respond in real time because “that’s where the conversation is happening,” he said. “Your brand is being shaped by social media if you’re not shaping it yourself.”

Matt Horace, a former law enforcement official who now serves as a law enforcement analyst on CNN, said whether it’s a law enforcement agency or a big corporation, an organization needs to know how to manage a crisis and the communications surrounding it. And a key part of that is engaging on social media, knowing what’s being said and interacting in a way that is authentic and not in a way that seems disingenuous or that will erode trust. “This can’t be a stunt,” he said.