

## “Listening and responding honestly”

Management consultant Ewald Wessling is an expert in Web 2.0 communications and knows what a blessing, but also what a curse, social networks can be for companies

How important is it for real estate companies to be present on social media sites?

It is essential, because the way that younger people communicate has changed and shifted so rapidly. A manager has just told me that his employees used to ask him, their superior, when they had a problem. Now they talk to friends working for other companies via the net when they are looking for solutions. This means: even if I do not yet need social media for my business model or official communication with the outside world, I have to assume that my employees will be communicating via social platforms.

From what point do you need a social media strategy?

In principle, from the moment that I begin operating on these platforms. Because from that point onwards, whether I like it or not, I am entering into a direct dialogue with the public. I can then no longer determine what dimension the dialogue will take on. Companies can sometimes fall into bad ways. This is because what is written on the net, if you are unlucky, can trigger an avalanche of bad communication. This is what Americans very distinctively call a “shitstorm”.

And how can companies prevent this from happening?

By drawing up rules governing communication. What do we want to publish, and which topics are we handling internally? Most companies think about the image they wish to project to the public, such as when they organise their public relations. They have to go

through a similar process when they start to communicate via social networks.

How specifically do you develop a social media strategy?

There is no general formula. Many companies seek extensive advice before embarking on activities on social networks. At other companies individual units experiment with social media initially and the experience gained is then evaluated. It is always important to define clearly the aims that are being pursued when you enter the field of social media communications. The form of activity and the most suitable platform can be derived from that.

How should enquiries and comments be handled in Web 2.0 communications?

Companies must always respond to feedback on a Twitter account or a Facebook page and try to use it constructively. They must therefore listen, take the content and its sender seriously and answer honestly. We all have to learn to admit mistakes and to accept suggestions on how we could do things better. It would be disastrous to bury your head in the sand, especially where critical issues are concerned. A social media strategy will also define who answers, and when and where the answer is given, and for companies this means that they have to prepare and provide resources. In this way they are equipped if that communications avalanche starts rolling – and able to prevent the worst in the communications storm.

Ewald Wessling was talking to Lars Reppesgaard.



**Ewald Wessling, Professor for new Forms of Communication, helps companies to transfer their strengths into the new digital markets.**