



Negative Product Review Revised after Company Founder Engages with Critic

Company

Babble Soft, provider of Web and mobile software for parents of newborns

<http://babblesoft.com>

Challenge

A press release for a new product launch was picked up by an influential blogger who wrote a very negative review.

Solution

Every Dot Connects worked with Babble Soft on a strategy to engage the blogger in constructive conversation.

Success

The blogger apologized for the tone of the review and continued to interact with Babble Soft founder via her blog, email and, later, on Twitter and other social networks.

In March 2007, when entrepreneur Aruni Gunasegaram, founder of Babble Soft, launched a new mobile version of Baby Manager software (now called Baby Insights), she hired a local PR agency to create a news release and pitch mainstream media, and retained Every Dot Connects to create a social media strategy and blogger outreach.

The first pickup of the Babble Soft news release appeared in a negative review by Jennifer Laycock, author of The Lactivist blog, one of the leading online voices for moms who breastfeed. In a post titled, "Good Grief, How Anal Can We Get?" Laycock said, "The Baby Manager press release reads like something out of a SNL commercial...Can't you just see Will Farrell holding up an infant by the arm pits with a quizzical look on his face? Suddenly a light bulb goes off over his head and Will gives a big grin to the camera as he pulls out his Blackberry and checks to see [when] baby was last fed."

In fact, Laycock went so far as to ask if the Baby Manager news release was a gag. Comments on the blog were equally negative, although a few responded that they could possibly see a use for the software.

Gunasegaram was understandably upset, but instead of responding immediately, she contacted Every Dot Connects for help. We quickly prepared a set of guidelines for engaging with The Lactivist, which Gunasegaram followed. When she posted a comment on the blog explaining the origin and purpose of the software, it was well received. Laycock apologized for the harsh tone of her original post, and the negative commentary not only stopped, it turned into a positive encounter. Read the entire exchange here: <http://thelactivist.blogspot.com/2007/03/good-grief-how-anal-can-we-get.html>

I want to compliment you on the way you handled your response to my blog post. I was pretty hard on you guys and you came in with class and style and really did a great job of turning the situation around to make yourself look good. I work in online reputation management and it's rare to see a company respond so well. Just thought you should know that you gained my respect with that.

email from Jennifer Laycock,
The Lactivist blog



Every Dot Connects:
<http://everydotconnects.com>

Located in Austin, Texas, Every Dot Connects is a social media consortium, a group of independent marketing and media practitioners who are passionate about using new technologies to build bridges between people and ideas and causes.

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Guidelines for Companies Engaging with Blogger Critics

(excerpted from the guidelines written for Babble Soft)

It's not the same old media world where things get fact-checked and written in objective journalistic style. It's fast-moving, free-flowing and occasionally brutal. Influential bloggers often have inflated egos and their writing may have a snarky tone. Before you dash off a defensive reply, read all the comments carefully. Take time to find out more about the blogger and the topics s/he covers. Try to find a point of connection before joining the conversation.

1. Craft a reasoned but conversational response. Stick to the facts and be honest. Drop the marketing-speak and talk like a normal human being. Do not engage in name calling or ad hominem attacks.

2. It's bad form to post multiple links or other items (such as a testimonial) in the comment section of someone else's blog. That's considered hijacking.

3. When you add a comment, there will be three blanks to fill in before you reach the comment section.

Name: use your full name

E-mail address: use one that goes to your domain, and one that has a good spam filter on it. You may wind up starting an e-mail correspondence with the blogger. [Note: that did happen with Gunasegaram and Laycock.]

URL: put your main Web site URL here. When a viewer mouses over your name displayed on a comment, it will show your Web site as a clickable link.

4. Bookmark not just the blog URL but the permalink to the particular post. This will make it easier to track additional comments if there is no way to receive RSS or email updates. There may be further discussion and you may want to participate again. Be careful not to let the discussion devolve into a "flame war" with people taking sides and escalating the heated rhetoric, but you have a right to be in the discussion.

5. Take a look at who is commenting. Mouse over their names and see if they also blog. If so, visit their blog and check the tone of articles and comment. If there has been any mention of your company, take the same approach for responding. Just keep your cool, don't let the criticism get to you.

Engaging critics effectively is time-consuming, but the potential for turning critics into allies is well worth the effort.