

Worldcom Public Relations Group Weighs in on Impact Of “Fake News”

Latest Installment of Voxpopme-Powered “Issues Insights” Finds That Over 80 Percent of Global PR Experts Do Not Believe the American News-Consuming Public is Able to Tell the Difference Between Fake News Sites and Legitimate Sources

NEW YORK – March 16, 2017 – As fake news and “alternative facts” continue to generate humorous online memes and punch lines, public relations and marketing professionals have an urgent need to discuss how fake news seriously affects brands. According to a new partner survey conducted by The Worldcom Public Relations Group (Worldcom), a global partnership of the most experienced independent public relations firms in the world, over 80 percent of respondents indicated that they do not believe the American news-consuming public is able to identify fake news – an alarming revelation for marketing professionals. The survey also revealed that over 50 percent of respondents have had to counsel clients on the topic of fake news in the last 45 days.

“The truth about fake news is that, sadly, this is a very serious and legitimate issue that affects the integrity of the PR and marketing professions, as well as the ultimate end result of informing the news-consuming public,” said Jonathan Bloom, marketing chair of Worldcom Public Relations Group Americas Region and CEO of McGrath/Power Public Relations and Communications, San Jose, Calif. “Certainly, over the years, marketers and brands have enjoyed a fair amount of freedom pushing the boundaries of news dissemination, but the current climate has forced us to confront the more sinister motives of spreading fake news. We’ve seen firsthand the dangers of how false news stories spread on social media platforms, making it even more important now for PR and marketing agencies to counsel their clients on these external factors and how these alarming trends can impact their brands.”

Worldcom partners agreed that organizations that found themselves victim of a fake news story should approach the story with a strategy similar to that used in any other crisis communications situation: Assess, contain and combat. The proliferation of fake news and its potential for rapid reach on social media have made it essential for all communications teams to consider strategies now rather than waiting until the company or brand finds itself the subject of a fake news story. Many fake news stories appear on websites that do not follow the same journalistic code of ethics as publications, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, making it essential for communications teams to be prepared to leverage social media channels to share data, images, videos and third party sources to correct fake news stories in a convincing manner. Finally, just as with any crisis communications situation, information that could be interpreted as validation for a fake news claim should be disclosed immediately. Full transparency is paramount to diffusing any negative story, fake or otherwise.

Adding context to the partner survey, Worldcom leveraged VoxPopMe, a powerful video platform that allows brands to capture instantaneous feedback from any audience, to collect real-time perspectives and opinions from its global members on these issues about Fake News. A compilation of these video responses is available for viewing by visiting the following link: <https://youtu.be/AoZ4kpnr37U>.

About The Worldcom Public Relations Group

The Worldcom Public Relations Group is the world's leading partnership of independently owned public relations firms, with 143 offices employing some 2,000 staff in 115 cities across six continents. In total, Worldcom partners reported combined revenue of US\$288 million last year from 3,034 clients. Established in 1988, the group was formed so that the strongest, most capable independent firms could deliver immediate impact and sustained value through the intelligent use of communications – wherever in the world a client needs support. Partners serve national, international and multinational clients, while retaining the flexibility and client-service focus inherent in independent agencies. Through Worldcom, clients have on-demand access to in-depth communications expertise from professionals who understand the language, culture and customs of the geographic areas in which they operate. www.worldcomgroup.com

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