

Praise for Charlie Fern
by Scott Hepburn, a
veteran copywriter for
the PRstore, on his
Web site's blog. ==>
<http://tinyurl.com/bcktnp>



misscharlie

twitter

Speaking of my days in Washington, it's been a blast getting to know @misscharlie, a.k.a. Charlie Fern, a one-time speechwriter for former First Lady Laura Bush. Charlie has all the sass and spunk you'd expect of a vivacious writer, and her commentaries on everything from press pools to Supreme Court justices are glimpses into America's personality.



Charlie Fern joins the Saint Edward's University faculty as adjunct professor in 09

In January Charlie started teaching a public relations course to a full class of undergraduate students. Public relations is offered through the university's communications department, and most of the students are pursuing majors in PR or similar fields. Charlie chose to teach the 3-hour course on Tuesday nights so she could continue to work with her clients and build her communications consulting company.

As part of the course, Charlie started a guest lecture series. There will be two panel discussions this spring: one, on technology and social networking; another, on non-profit public relations. State leaders, entrepreneurs, and executives with expertise working in and around professional communications and public relations will also spend an hour with the class, talking about their work and answering questions.

Speakers include: Justice Don Willett, Representative Diane Patrick, Southwest Airlines Vice President (public affairs) Linda Rutherford, Arnold Garcia from the Austin American-Statesman, and others.

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Imagine: Blogging

One of the values of a social networking site like Twitter is that it directs widespread attention to blogs, which say much more about a person or a company than a 140-word "Tweet". In fact, advocates say that **blogs can enhance corporate public relations through writing that's honest, transparent, and even funny.** These days there's something to be said about reinforcing corporate identities with honest, open and sympathetic communications. Charlie has spent the past three months writing blogs and testing her mettle on Twitter. **The result: new connections, better visibility and more Web site traffic.** Her blog: <http://charliefern.blogspot.com>



Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without the talking about the other.

-Bill Gates

Whether the writing is on the wall or in a blog, your ideas deserve to be read.



Virtual or not, social networking is a business reality

Last year I attended a Texas Public Relations Association "Public Relations Boot Camp" on social networking. I expected the event to be a social mixer where people would be talking about their networking efforts and groups such as BNI. Instead, I spent an entire day taking notes and listening to an extraordinary series of presentations about harnessing the powerful tools of technology and social networking to communicate with audiences and build relationships with respected professionals and leaders around the globe.

According to a Pew Internet & American Life Project survey, **35 percent of adult internet users have a profile on an online social networking site - a number that has quadrupled in three years.**

"Many people, including scholars, advertisers and political activists, see online and social networks as an opportunity to study the propagation of ideas, the formation of social bonds and viral marketing, among others," stated one recent study.

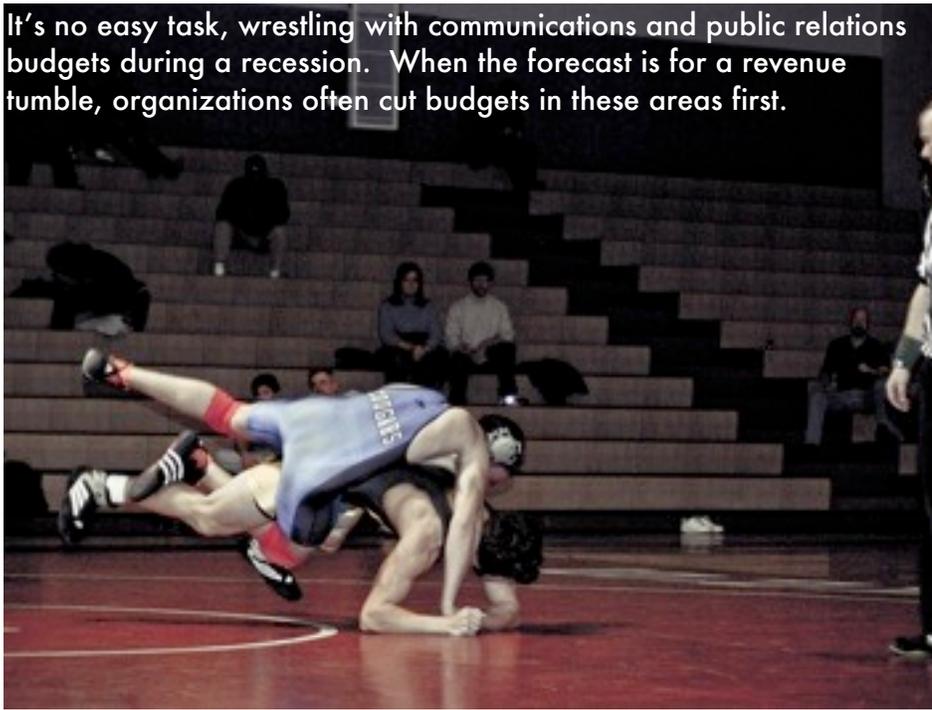
I left the seminar with new respect for blogging, which can have a significant impact on professional credibility and income-generating traffic when compared to traditional business websites. I also left with a nagging curiosity about an open-source, micro-blogging enigma called Twitter.

Twitter appears to be one of the leaders in social networking sites (neck and neck, apparently, with Facebook). According to Nielsen Online, **Twitter recorded a staggering 422 percent growth in one year and estimates the site generated about 2.5 million unique visitors.**

I signed up to try it out and was astonished by the quality of professionals and information on Twitter. I engaged nationally recognized bloggers in public "conversations" and watched my website traffic increase by several thousand hits. I suspect companies will soon hire social media experts whose jobs are to scan sites like Twitter and write blogs on behalf of the company.

If you'd like to hear more about how Charlie Fern Ink can help you establish a credible presence on social networks or your website, please call.

It's no easy task, wrestling with communications and public relations budgets during a recession. When the forecast is for a revenue tumble, organizations often cut budgets in these areas first.



Why organizations should outsource communications during the budget crunch

Recent reports suggest that many U.S. organizations have reacted to the recession by cutting budgets and employees in their communications, public relations and public affairs divisions – an decision that stems from a belief, often at the top of an organization, that such areas are non-essential.

Yet during any period of crisis, the opposite is actually true – **the greater the crisis, the more vital the need to engage and communicate with internal and external audiences** (employees, shareholders, analysts, consumers, media, opinion leaders, regulatory agencies, governments, and the general public).

Clear, consistent messages promote trust, confidence and loyalty. While it's never appropriate to speculate, it is important to keep the lines of communication open during a decision-making or action-taking process (as was clear in the U.S. Airways example). It's equally important to relay known facts and decisions as that information becomes available.

Public perception is a powerful tool that can make or break sales – and dramatically impact the business bottom

line. Those who strive to reach key audiences and listen to their stakeholders right now will come out ahead of the competition when the country recovers from this economic downturn.

Experts in marketing and communications point to the benefits of advertising products, sales, money-saving tools and financial services during a recession. (Read the sidebar about Dryel for a great example of smart investments in advertising.)

Organizations that have already made budget cuts (and those looking to save money) can **find value in a different strategy: outsourcing public relations and communications campaigns to firms that specialize in these areas.**

Small and independent firms have less overhead, therefore offer better prices, and personalized service. Corporations that bid on government contracts or receive taxpayer dollars earn incentives and win bids when they work with certified woman-owned, minority-owned, and disadvantaged businesses (WBEs, MBEs, and DBEs).

The pool of talent in small, independent companies continues to grow as highly skilled professionals with subject-matter expertise strike out their own. And contractors cost less than full-time employees in terms of taxes, training, benefits and resources.

There's a message in this madness. Are you willing to listen – and deliver?

Case Study: Dryel

Company can hang the competition out to dry with ads that target the newly budget-conscious

I recently saw a commercial for Dryel (a home dry-cleaning product), and I had one of those "Aha!" moments. Dry-cleaning is one of the first casualties of a household budget in a recession, and that's a problem for all those "Dry Clean Only" garments in our closets. For Dryel, penny pinching times present an opportunity to reach an important audience: upper-middle and middle-class Americans with a wrinkle in their dry-cleaning budget. Dryel has a cost-saving solution for that growing pile of "Dry Clean Only" clothes in the hamper. And someone in charge realized that **now is the time to spend money on ads that put Dryel in front of an emerging market.** People may try Dryel now because they have to. If the product is good enough, people will buy Dryel later because they want to. The company's Web site statistics showed a spike in traffic in October (when recession news hit hard), and I suspect it'll continue to rise as more people start looking for ways to save money.

"Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication"

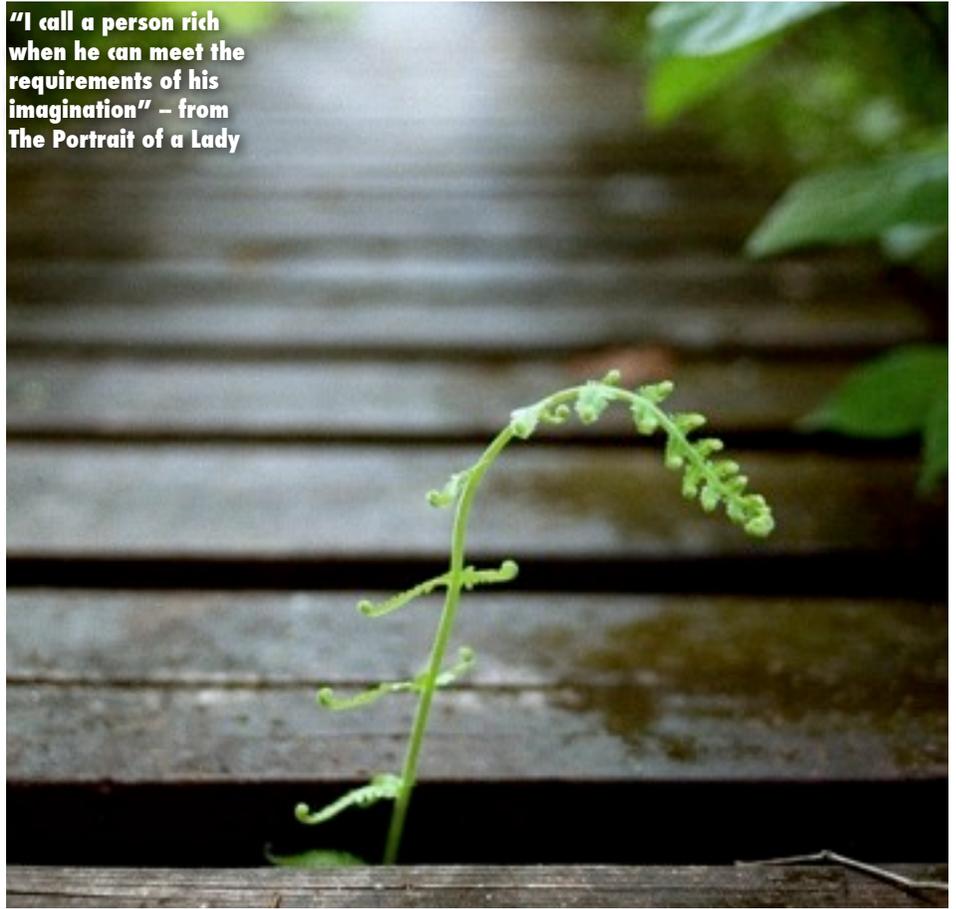
-Marshal McLuhan



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"I call a person rich
when he can meet the
requirements of his
imagination" – from
The Portrait of a Lady



How companies deal with crisis speaks volumes about their business ethics

After Hudson crash, US Air's swift, appropriate reaction turned a crisis into a lesson in leadership

Recent news about the miraculous landing of a U.S. Airways jet on the Hudson River demonstrates an important lesson in corporate public relations: We don't choose adversity. But we can certainly choose how to behave under adverse conditions. Captain "Sully" Sullenberger masterfully avoided disaster and emerged from his airplane a hero. U.S. Airways mastered the situation on the ground as well: They moved swiftly to get information out to key audiences through press conferences & interviews with officials

(including the captain), through the company Web site, through phone calls to family members and, later, letters to passengers. Their communications were sympathetic, honest and informative. We learned, for example, about personal items recovered from the plane and the river – officials also explained why the items weren't being returned (investigators needed to determine how the plane was loaded and weight was distributed).

U.S. Air's response to this disaster says a lot about the company – especially one that operates in a heavily regulated industry and a highly litigious environment. It says they hire competent professionals and train them well. It says their executives value transparency over cover-ups and would rather assist, than resist, an outside investigation.

It says the company would rather write a \$5,000 check to every passenger on the plane than toss out travel vouchers. And it says they value clear communication and public relations. U.S. Air chose to behave honorably - engaging key audiences instead of stonewalling. They out-shined competitors such as American Airlines, which has proven to be less than forthright and helpful under similar circumstances. American should take note of what U.S. Air already knows: The Most Admired Fortune 500 Companies have one trait in common – they value public relations, and the head of their PR team has a seat at the policy table.

What about your company? Does your PR team have what it takes to master a disaster with an open, honest strategy?

Charlie Fern Ink, LLC is
now officially certified as a

WBE/DBE

In December 2008 we completed the arduous process of being certified by the Texas and U.S. governments as a Woman-Owned Business (WBE) and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE). This designation strengthens our position as a government contractor or subcontractor. If you have questions about the DBE/WBE certification or process, call us at 800-349-9048.

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