

# NettRESULTS

international marketing & public relations

## NettResults Public Relations Middle East

December 2011

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Dear Dianne,

Year ends... year begins. And with that comes a lot of reporting and planning.

There are two things a PR agency needs to do in order to be successful for a client. Firstly, they need to get great results. Secondly, they need to communicate that they are getting great results. One without the other does not lead to a successful agency.

So, we're in the season when we have to show short and long term results and with that comes a lot of pride and a healthy dollop of learning. We see what can be improved; and work on fresh ideas on how to develop campaigns or build new ones for the future.

One of the developments NettResults is investigating is how, in 2012, social media will change PR. There are some clear trends that we see with clients, some of which are explained in the main article below. Before you jump to that, we do need to be clear - social media has already changed PR. But with all clients we have to specifically call out that 'social media outreach' and 'how social media is used by PR agencies as part of their media communication mix' are two very different actions. The line is often blurred for some clients, and that leads to a confusing social media strategy development.

How can NettResults help to have a clear social media strategy in the Middle East?

*Nick Leighton*

Happy PRing,

## Power is nothing without control...

Power is nothing without control - according to the tire manufacturer Pirelli. And so it is with public relations. Gone are the days when an organization can fully control their corporate message to the media.

In days gone by, it was normal for an organization's employee handbook to strictly dictate that no employee could speak to the media without prior approval and spokesperson media training. No problem.

Then a few years ago social media popped up. According to a recent piece of research by Altimeter, companies average an overwhelming number of corporate owned accounts - about 178. That is a bunch of people from different departments and around the globe that are

speaking on social media platforms, that the media are seeing. And that's before we count the personal SM accounts of employees who happen to mention their job. So what's to be done?

NettResults recommends three levels of corporate communication development:

1 - **Relinquish a mindset of control** - instead usher 'enablement'. In business school we were taught to foster message control and encourage all corporate representatives to stay on message. Yet today, as multiple business units from support, sales, HR and beyond participate in social technologies, communication is spread to the edges of the company - not just from the PR department. As a result, PR groups have changed their mindset to safely enabling business units to communicate, based on pre-set parameters they put in place through governance, coordination, and workflow.

2 - **Roll out enterprise workflows** - education programs at four levels. We've found that savvy corporations have detailed workflows, including sample language in which employees should respond. Beyond creating these workflows, they must be distributed throughout the enterprise through education programs, and drilled. We've found savvy corporations have up to four types of education programs spanning: Executive team, social media team, business stakeholder teams, and finally all associates. Even if the mandate is for rank and file employees to not respond in social on behalf of the company, reinforcing education is still required.

3 - **Run mock crises**. Lastly, we've found a closer relationship with media relations, social media and crisis communications. Savvy corporations are working with agency partners such as NettResults to setup mock crisis drills where they approach a weeklong crises in a number of hours in private. Not only does this test the mettle of the organization it provides useful training so companies can respond faster, in a more coordinated approach. We have already witnessed health organizations receiving 'social-crises-ready' compliance notices and we expect compliance programs to spread into other industries.

Get ready - take control.



## Country Profile - Syria

Once the centre of the Islamic Empire, Syria covers an area that has seen invasions and occupations over the ages, from Romans and Mongols to Crusaders and Turks.



A country of fertile plains, mountains and deserts, it is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Christians, Druze,

Alawite Shias and Arab Sunnis, the last of who make up a majority of the Muslim population.

Modern Syria gained its independence from France in 1946 but has lived through periods of political instability driven by the conflicting interests of these various groups.

From 1958-61 it united with Nasser's Egypt, but an army coup restored independence before the Alawite-controlled pan-Arab Baath (Renaissance) party took control in 1963. It rules to this day.

Baath government has seen authoritarian rule at home and a strong anti-Israeli policy abroad, particularly under former President Hafez al-Assad. In 1967 Syria lost the Golan Heights to the Israelis, while civil war in neighboring Lebanon allowed it to extend its political and military influence in the region.

Syria pulled its forces out of Lebanon in 2005, having come under intense international pressure to do so after the assassination of Lebanese former premier Rafik Hariri. A UN report implicated Syrian and pro-Syria Lebanese officials in the killing. Damascus denied any involvement.

The government has dealt harshly with domestic opposition. Tens of thousands are reported to have been killed in the crackdown on the 1982 uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama.

And in 2011 security forces used tanks, gunfire and mass arrests to try crush anti-government street protests inspired by the Arab Spring that toppled the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt.

Following the death of Hafez al-Assad in 2000, Syria underwent a degree of relaxation. Hundreds of political prisoners were released. But the granting of real political freedoms and a shake-up of the state-dominated economy have not materialized.

On the world stage Damascus has been increasingly isolated in recent years, having come under fire for its alleged support for insurgents in Iraq, and over its role in Lebanon.

That isolation showed signs of easing after efforts by France to bring Syria back into the international fold in 2008, but allegations of Syria's violation of a UN ban on arming the Lebanese Hezbollah militia led to the extension of US sanctions in May 2010.

Further international sanctions were imposed amid the bloody crackdown on protesters in 2011.

Syria is one of Israel's harshest opponents, and supports a number of armed groups that carry out attacks against Israel. Hopes for reconciliation have foundered over the future status of the Golan Heights.

Peace talks between the two countries stalled in January 2000, and

indirect talks under Turkish auspices in 2008 came to an end amid tensions over Hezbollah and Syrian support for the Hamas Islamic government in Gaza.

## Media in Syria

The government and ruling party own and control much of the media. Criticism of the president and his family is banned and the domestic and foreign press are censored. Journalists practice self-censorship and foreign reporters rarely get accreditation.

Private TV networks and FM radio stations are on the air, but they cannot transmit news or political content. Many viewers watch pan-Arab TV stations; there are no restrictions on the use of satellite receivers.

With 3.9 million internet users in Syria by June 2010 (Internetworldstats.com), the web has emerged as a vehicle for dissent.

The state exercises strict internet censorship and blocks many global websites with local appeal, including Facebook and YouTube, as well as opposition sites.

### The press

- Al-Baath - paper of ruling Baath party
- Al-Thawra ("The Revolution") - government-owned daily
- Tishrin - government-owned daily
- Syria Today - English-language monthly



### Television

- Syrian TV - state-run, operates two domestic networks and a satellite channel, broadcasting in Arabic, English and French
- Al-Dunya TV - private
- Radio
- Syrian Arab Republic Radio - state-run
- Al-Madina FM - first private radio station, launched in March 2005

### News agency

- Syrian Arab News Agency (Sana) - state-run, in Arabic, English and French

## Media News

Syria's only privately-owned political daily, Al-Watan and website Sham Press have been added to a European Union sanctions blacklist for their alleged role in a state crackdown on dissent, AFP has reported. Created in 2006 by three businessmen, Al-Watan is based in a Damascus free trade area and has 120 employees, including 52

journalists. It is expected to lose \$1.7m this year.

Al Jazeera may launch an initial public offering (IPO) next year as the Qatar government looks to offload stakes in state-owned entities, Reuters has reported, citing a senior executive at the country's stock exchange. "They (Al Jazeera) have a strong desire to go for an IPO and list the company at Qatar Exchange. But due to some regulatory requirements with the Ministry of Business and Trade and the Qatar Central Bank it may be next year," the source said.

The English service of Doha-based Al Jazeera has signed an agreement with India's direct-to-home player, Dish TV, for its distribution in the Sub-continent. Al Jazeera English is also in talks to reach similar deals with other direct-to-home players like Tata Sky, Airtel Digital TV and Videocon and cable operators in the country, said Al Anstey, managing director of Al Jazeera English. The channel will be international in its outlook but will also cover local news with an international impact, he said. The broadcaster may also bring other specialised channels on sports and documentary to the country, but at present it would focus on establishing a reputation for its news content, said Anstey.



Five bloggers who were found guilty of threatening state security were last week pardoned by UAE President Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Officials said the men were among the 554 prisoners across the country who were pardoned by Shaikh Khalifa ahead of the 40th UAE National Day celebrations (2nd December). The activists were convicted for endangering national security a few days before they were pardoned. They were sentenced to up to three years in prison by the Federal Supreme Court with no right to appeal the verdict.

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