

Dell, by Going Click for Click With Web Posters, Ensured Bloggers Saw Its New Red Mini Laptop

Dell Inc. hit a viral-PR home run last week when photos of a not-yet-released computer-a candy-red miniature laptop-swept across the Internet, creating excitement in advance of the release.

The buzz wasn't an accident: **It was the payoff from a year-long effort by Dell to engage more directly with bloggers and others who write about the company online.**

On the Internet, people can say anything about your business and there's very little you can do about it. Some businesses try to ignore unflattering blog posts or message-board rants. Others try to make them go away through lawsuits and other techniques. But online information-or disinformation-almost always lives on, as Dell found out three years ago when a popular blogger wrote a series of scathing posts about Dell's customer service.

About a year ago, Dell decided to address these comments head on. ***"Companies want to engage in a conversation with customers when they want to sell them something, but not at any other time," says Andy Lark, Dell's vice president of communications. That's the wrong approach, Mr. Lark says; instead, it's in a company's best interest to deal directly with any complaints or criticism on the Internet.***

Today, it's nearly impossible to find a story or blog entry about Dell that isn't accompanied by a comment from the company. Dell left a comment in response to a recent post on WSJ.com's Business Technology Blog about the personal computer maker's plan to offer premium customer service. Another Dell correspondent wrote an entry about the post on the company's blog.

A Dell spokesman posted a lengthy defense of his company in the "comment" section of a recent CNet article. And it isn't just mainstream media blogs: A Dell spokesman was quick to post a comment when Daddyblogger.com-a parenting site with no obvious tech-bent wrote about a bad experience with Dell. The PC maker says it now has an entire team dedicated to finding and responding to comments about Dell on the Internet.

Engaging with blogs isn't just a defensive move. ***It has also changed the way the company promotes its products.*** Chief Executive Michael Dell brought the buzz-generating candy-red computer to The Wall Street Journal's D: All Things Digital conference with the goal of showing it off to some of the bloggers in attendance.

A writer from Gizmodo, a popular gadget blog, saw the new computer and snapped a few pictures, which he posted on the Internet. The company then posted some official pictures on its own blog, and the story took on a life of its own. Dell's blog post says Gizmodo, "caught" Michael Dell with the new computer. Mr. Lark says he took the computer to the conference hoping someone would write about it, although he adds, "We didn't scheme everything up."