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## Fake News and Business Protection

### Understanding fake news

Fake news is a sophisticated, highly competitive industry. Anybody who can build an efficient fake news network reaps some rewards, and those rewards can be huge. The content disseminated doesn't really matter – it's the speed at which that content can be propagated.

Fake news was soon established as an excellent way to mobilise certain shades of public opinion. Alongside social media acted as force multipliers. The rapid spread of fake news shows again the power of social platforms to damage reputations, and why companies have to be more vigilant and creative in their responses.

Fake news poses a threat that extends far beyond the political realm. Businesses are increasingly falling foul of the epidemic, and are doing so at risk of grave reputational damage.

Some have been the subject of targeted fake news campaigns, designed to manipulate public perceptions of the brand. Others have circulated false information themselves, or made decision on its basis, undermining their own credibility and diminishing the efficaciousness of their own strategy.

There are steps that businesses can take to reduce the likelihood that they will become involved in a fake news scandal, and to ensure that they are prepared in the event that they are.



### #1. Do a media audit

Carrying out a media audit will help you understand what sort of content exists about you online, and will allow you to keep tabs on new content as it emerges. At a minimum, businesses should actively monitor the web by using Google alerts, and should regularly check review websites for fake information.

This better equips the business to respond in the case that something false is spread. Last year, a fake news website shared an article stating that an Indian restaurant had been found serving human meat. The story circulated widely on social media, and the owners were harassed until they issued a statement discrediting the story. By addressing the issue quickly, companies can reduce the subsequent airtime it gets.

### #2. Do your homework

Many companies use data collected from social media to inform decisions, without checking its veracity. There have been instances where companies have used consumer interaction data to inform strategy on a new product iteration, only to later find that the data was manipulated by bot involvement, with the product underperforming. Social data can be insightful, but to ensure credibility it should be used alongside data that has been collected elsewhere.

### #3. Build an online presence

Establishing a recognisable social media presence can be invaluable in terms of tackling fake news – followers will be more likely to question stories that don't seem to match the brand's personality. Further, having an engaged following that you regularly interact with, means your social channels are likely to be the first place that people go when they hear a shocking story about the company. This is crucial for getting a correction message out quickly and effectively.

### #4. Prepare a rapid response

Scenario plan how you would address fake news and involve critical members of your senior team in this activity. Agree roles and responsibilities and the steps you would take to initiate your company's response. Identify where you need additional resources, people or technology to ensure you can act quickly and effectively. Make sure approval procedures are clear.

### #5. Monitor the landscape

Given that the key to addressing fake news is speed, knowing what is being said about you at the earliest opportunity is a pre-requisite for reputation protection. Establish a comprehensive real-time monitoring capability that alerts you to mentions of your brand in traditional media, online and social media.

### #6. Calibrate your response

While speed is of the essence, a kneejerk reaction to the first appearance of fake news can turn a small flame into a raging inferno. You need to quickly determine whether this is likely to be an unnoticed blip or the beginning of a large reputational challenge.

### #7. Communicate your own narrative

Assuming you have determined that proactive communication is the appropriate response, communicate quickly and expansively. Address inaccuracies head on and fill online, social and traditional media with accurate information about your business.

### #8. Brief your key stakeholders

Prioritise the people most important to your business and use your own channels (your website, social media feeds, intranet and face-to-face contact) so that they hear the truth about your business directly from you.

Critically, make sure that your staff are briefed as a top priority. Not only is it essential that they continue to trust the organisation that they work for; armed with the facts about the situation, employees can be your best advocates when explaining your company's ethos and practices to friends and contacts.