Information dispatch

In case you haven't heard by now, Facebook had silently changed their terms of service a few days ago and then, when caught by a media observer and reported all over the news, was forced to backtrack because of public outrage over the ownership of information. What is interesting about this is that yet again, Facebook shows a complete lack of awareness about public opinion, and more importantly, how to handle such public opinion. It may have something to do with the very young, and obviously not media savvy, CEO Matt Zuckerberg. Facebook is a new concept and a new company, and as such, does not have methods in place to disseminate information effectively to both its members and the public at large. It does not seem to understand that there is always someone watching and that you must have a plan to deal with issues as they arise.

Unfortunately, this is the second time that Facebook is being reactionary because of public outrage. The first was last year when it announced a rather invasive advertising plan based on various items on people's profiles, and then selling things to their friends based on those profiles. There was outrage over privacy. In fact, privacy seems to be Facebook's Achilles' heel. The company cannot seem to find the right balance between protecting its users' privacy and the needs to grow revenue and membership.

It hurts any company's credibility to have the media inform its customers of a change in terms of service. It hurts Facebook to have to retract and retrace steps. Many people are now confused about what is private or not private on their profiles. It will cause some people to get off Facebook and others to change the way they use Facebook. In short, a failure to communicate clearly and directly has created a load a negative publicity for Facebook, and has alienated its core customer base.

I hope that this time Facebook reconsiders its public relations program, if indeed it has any. I would advise Facebook to hire PR counsel and to focus on how to best communicate with its public.