An agile approach to reputational management

As societal expectations and behavioural norms evolve and diversify, so too do the reputational decisions organizations must make. Today's business climate is radically different to even a decade ago and continues to change at pace.

The purpose, ethics, transparency, environmental impact and social responsibility of every organization is under the spotlight. Added to this is the speed at which brand damage can now occur via social media – forcing corporate teams to consider the agility of their reputational management. Corporations can use standards to develop an optimal foundation to help improve brand perceptions.

Agility comes from building the right processes to ensure stakeholder, partner, customer and public perceptions are handled appropriately in every situation. Taking a standards-based approach allows large corporations to define the processes which embed agility and resilience into their reputational management, while creating a culture of repeatable excellence.

As well as having a direct bearing on corporate reputation, evolving consumer expectation frequently foreshadows more traditional stakeholder demands – governments, legislators and investors are ultimately motivated by popular sentiment. A standards-based approach to corporate strategy helps businesses balance these differing interests.

So, what are the key organizational areas that can have a bearing on your corporate reputation? And what standards can you use to embed the right processes and systems to handle them optimally?

Quality

If the quality of your product or service is variable, it'll be an uphill struggle to maintain a positive corporate reputation. ISO 9001 is the world's most recognized quality management standard. It has many powerful benefits, but from a reputational perspective it demonstrates a serious commitment to quality and continual improvement.

Customer service

Closely linked to quality is customer service. Social media and online ratings platforms have made it near-impossible to conceal shortcomings in this area.

Having standards-based quality management processes in place is the basis of customer satisfaction, enabling you to listen to, and communicate with, your customers while managing any issues.

ISO 10002 helps businesses optimize customer service levels to improve retention, loyalty and sharpen competitive edge – as well as create responsive systems to handle complaints, feedback and become fully customer focused.

Social responsibility

Social responsibility has long ceased to be optional for serious businesses. Broadly speaking this relates to organizational governance, anti-corruption, human rights, working practices, equality and environmental policies, as well as community issues. All of these elements are serious enough to permanently derail a company's reputation.

ISO 26001 outlines international recommendations for social responsibility covering the above areas, and more. It provides a framework around which to build a robust and long-term strategy.

Environment and sustainability

It goes with saying that different businesses will have a varying environmental impact, depending on their core activities, but one thing that every business has in common is the ability to reduce its environmental footprint.

ISO 14001 helps businesses make their daily operations more sustainable, reduce waste and contribute to improved brand perceptions, while ISO 50001 helps organizations build a viable energy management strategy. Both of these standards contribute to a robust reputation and competitive advantage.

Staff wellbeing and health

Reputational damage can also come from within an organization. Building meaningful employee trust has never been more important. The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer reported that "Employees are ready and willing to trust their employers, but the trust must be earned through more than "business as usual." Looking after your employees is a powerful way to do this and can help to make them your best advocates.

Paying attention to staff wellbeing also helps recruitment, retention, productivity and reduces absenteeism. Make a start using ISO 45001 and keep an eye out for ISO 45003, which is under development but will focus on psychological health in the workplace.

Data security

Finally, in today's ever-changing cybersecurity landscape there are many ways for criminals to exploit inefficient or outdated security systems. Hacking, phishing and distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks are a constant threat. In addition, there is also the potential for human error to contribute to data breaches.

Any cybersecurity incident has the potential to damage corporate reputation. Organizations can use ISO 27001 to build systems which bolster information security by reducing the likelihood of an incident, optimizing response protocols if one occurs and mitigating the resulting impact.

The above areas have an undeniable bearing on corporate reputation – fundamental factors which demand reliable structures for day-to-day business health. With standards in place, corporations can build the structural efficiency to meet today's need for agile reputational management and ensure that when unforeseen incidents do occur the response is timely and effective.

Summary

- Today's business climate is radically different to ten years previous and is continuing to evolve. Resilient reputational management is essential – the foundation of which can be developed using standards.
- A consistently high-quality product or service is key for positive corporate reputation. ISO 9001 demonstrates serious commitment to quality and continual improvement.
- Social responsibility is also essential to protect your organization's reputation. ISO 26001 provides a framework around which to build a robust and long-term strategy.
- Every business has the ability to reduce its environmental footprint. This is non-negotiable from a reputational standpoint. Standards like ISO 14001 and ISO 15001 help businesses become more sustainable and less wasteful, contributing to a robust reputation and competitive advantage.
- Building meaningful employee trust is

- Building meaningful employee trust is necessary: reputational damage can also come from within an organization. Look after your employees and make them your best advocates using ISO 45001. ISO 45003 will also focus on psychological health in the workplace.
- Social media and online ratings platforms highlight an organization's customer service performance. ISO 10002 helps businesses optimize customer service levels to improve retention, loyalty and sharpen competitive edge
- Cybersecurity incidents are a constant threat. Organizations can use ISO 27001 to build systems to reduce the likelihood of an incident and reduce the impact when one occurs.

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