**An Analysis of the Public Relations Practices of Wayfair, LLC.**

Rachel Comeau

Department of Journalism, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

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**Company Overview**

The founders of Wayfair, Steve Conine and Niraj Shah, met at a summer program located at Cornell University while they were in high school. They remained friends throughout college, took an entrepreneurship class and one day decided to start their own business. Before Wayfair came to be it was “called CSN Stores in which they sold speaker and television stands on the website RacksAndStands.com” (Peterson, 2014). The two continued to make online store fronts selling specific home goods. On these websites they would offer tips on how to purchase the best products for your space. As Conine and Shah were managing several websites at a time, they began to struggle with gaining returning customers and thus came up with the idea to create an “ultimate home store” (Peterson, 2014) which would be based in Boston.

The name Wayfair came about because the founders said, “ it was just two words that sounded good together. But over time, our guests built this brand alongside us and gave our pinwheel logo more purpose and meaning than we ever could have dreamed” (Wayfair, 2022). As it transformed from a physical building with a large selection of furniture to a popular website that was launched in 2011, Wayfair.com. During this same time the company launched a side website for discounted home goods called Joss & Main. It was not until recently that Wayfair became a public organization.

Wayfair prides itself on providing expertise for home goods, an unparalleled selection, tangible value and a seamless experience (Wayfair, 2022). They are based in Boston but have now expanded to Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The hope with having multiple locations across the globe is to provide their customers with faster and smoother shipping. Wayfair has tools that advise shoppers on how to best utilize their space so that making large furniture purchases goes smoothly.

As Wayfair continues to expand with their shares growing rapidly, they still have a long way to go before becoming profitable. In 2014, “Wayfair posted a net loss of $63.2 million in the first six months of 2014, compared to a loss of $24.3 million a year earlier” (Peterson, 2014). This has continued into 2022 as “the retailer swung to a loss from a profit a year ago, posting a $196 million operating loss and $202 million net loss during the quarter, according to a company press release. Active customers fell 12.5% from last year to 27.3 million” (Jansen, 2022). However, Wayfair, along with the CEOs Steve Conine and Niraj Shah, continue to provide their customers with a seamless experience and quality goods. They continue to provide meaning to their Pinwheel logo and hope to continue expanding in the future.

**Media Relations**

The most famous tool among media relations practitioners is the news release (Media Relations II). A news release is used to communicate accurate information with reporters to ensure the public is informed of what is going on within the company. A tool often used in tandem with the news release is a paid newswire service. These platforms share news releases with their subscribers, who are largely journalists (Media Relations II). Wayfair uses Business Wire for this purpose.

On February 24, 2022, Wayfair distributed a news release detailing its “Fourth Quarter and Full Year Results” (Carpenter, 2022). Fact sheets, tools used by media relations professionals to highlight the essential information (Media Relations II), reported a summary of the fourth quarter of 2021 and the year as a whole (Carpenter, 2022). Another tool used by media relations professionals is an interview (Media Relations II). CEO Niraj Shah was quoted, stating that his outlook for the company is optimistic (Carpenter, 2022). It was then announced that Wayfair’s Investment Relations team would be hosting a webcast, another popular tool (Media Relations

II), later that day to fully detail the report. Next, Wayfair includes a fact sheet about the company itself. Then, all legally required financial statements for the year are included (Carpenter, 2022). This news release is targeted toward an audience of current investors, but also financial reporters because they can reach potential new investors. This report speaks to the human interest of investors, who are looking to make more money. Timeliness is also a factor, as the report comes right after the fiscal year has ended (Media Relations I). Therefore, investors, financial analysts, and financial reporters would all find this release newsworthy.

On March 3, Wayfair distributed a news release announcing the partnership between the Wayfair Professional (Pros) program and Capital One Trade Credit to release a Wayfair credit card that "increases purchasing power," improves payment flexibility, and optimizes online banking. An interview with Margaret Lawrence, Vice President of Pros, is included, expressing her excitement. The article concludes with fact sheets about Pros, Wayfair, and Capital One (Hart, 2022). This release can be considered newsworthy because it appeals to an audience of consumers who may now want to utilize the benefits of this card.

On March 16, Wayfair distributed a news release announcing a collaboration between Annie Selke, founder of the Annie Selke Decor Company, and Wayfair's sister company, Perigold, to renovate the founder's Palm Desert home. Selke now serves as a member of Perigold's design council. Interviews with both Selke and Rebecca Ginns, the head of Perigold are included, as well as fact sheets about both Perigold and the Annie Selke Company (Frechette, March 2022). This release can be considered newsworthy because of its timeliness, as spring is a popular time for home purging and redecoration. It also includes a prominent figure (Media Relations I) such as Selke, thus appealing to both Perigold and Selke's respective audiences.

On April 7, Wayfair distributed a news release announcing the date for the first quarter report and a conference call to discuss the report. The news release ended with the standard Wayfair fact sheet (Gorman, 2022). While this release is not newsworthy in itself, as it is not necessarily new or impactful quite yet (Media Relations I), the conference call will be of interest to the financial community and will likely be followed by a news article depending on its contents.

On April 20, Wayfair distributed a news release announcing the date for the annual two-day Way Day sales event. An interview with CCO Steve Oblak and the standard Wayfair fact sheet were included, along with links to the sales (Frechette, April 2022). This release can be considered newsworthy among the consumer audience because of its timeliness. It is a popular, annual event that takes place after the spring cleaning period, often prompting home redecorating.

**Social Media**

The main use of social media in the professional world is to be a tool for communication. Organizations use social media to share content and engage with multiple audiences and publics. Social media is about being social, as it is shared media. You need to consider creating and fostering a culture of participation. An online community of individuals with similar interests who freely share ideas and content. Social media has shifted the power dynamic to the individuals using them. It is about a more balanced two-way or shared form of communication. It's about connecting and interacting with others in a conversation and personal way (Donohue, 2022).

Wayfair has a combined 9.6 million followers on Facebook and Instagram. These two social media channels are the most used social media platforms for the organization. In the last

10 posts by the organization on Facebook and Instagram, there is similar content. These posts highlight certain furniture or decorations to help spruce up rooms and give some personality to the home. Some of the posts use the hashtag of #noplacelikeit. However, in the last few posts Wayfair has been promoting and advertising Way Day. Way Day is Wayfair's biggest sale of the year, the organization slashes prices up to 80% off on all things home. It's a two day event that starts on April 27 and ends on the 28th. Free shipping on orders is included!. (Wayfair, 2022)

In an article titled "Social Media as a Business Model: Wayfair and Instagram" written by Colin Sims-O'Grady, Wayfair admitted "that their biggest goal was to continue to build and strengthen their online presence, specifically on socials, in order to gain devotion from both new and existing customers" (Sims-O'Grady, 2019). Wayfair had set out specific goals for their social media channels, specifically expanding their Instagram reach and overall followers. As well addressing issues with the organization by decreasing the negative amount of comments and experiences shared by their followers. Another thing Wayfair has utilized well is influencer marketing. Wayfair has implemented Instagram's shopping feature into their social media strategy. They utilize this feature to reach larger audiences and hopefully gain new customers. This feature tags products in posts, lists the price and provides a quick link to their website so customers can quickly buy the product they've just seen from the post. This makes it easier for the customer, and reduces the chances of them looking elsewhere for price or quality. In just a few clicks, they are guided directly from the post to the checkout page on Wayfair's website (Sims-O'Grady, 2019).

Wayfair is one of the most successful furniture retailers on social media. They understand what content works for which platform, and what features certain social media channels have, and capitalize on them. Wayfair also cares about communication with their customers.

Customers have displayed many frustrations with the company, specifically regarding shipping and customer service. Wayfair responded to these comments, and asked the customer to message them with their order number, email, and phone number for further assistance. The social media team included an option on their website to report any problems with an order, as well.

**Integrated Marketing/ Strategic Communications**

Through Integrated Marketing and Strategic Communication practices, Wayfair is able to cleverly blend the practices of public relations, advertising, and marketing. This holistic communication combination enhances a company's relationship with its customers and can strengthen a partnership with other companies. According to *Answers for Modern Communicators* by Deirdre Breakenridge, "together, PR and marketing create the communication to build loyalty and brand advocacy… The two together are greater than the sum of their parts" (Breakenridge, 52). When put together, marketing and PR can create a fantastic loyalty opportunity with the aid of advertising. One specific partnership/loyalty program that Wayfair promotes is a partnership with Capital One Trade Credit.

Wayfair Professional is a sector of Wayfair that helps to make business spaces look great. To achieve this, they developed a professional program that allows their business customers a range of membership privileges. According to Businesswire, "the program offers members an expansive selection of products and exclusive savings across thousands of top brands as well as customizable shipping, easy invoicing, dedicated service, and more." Wayfair and Capital One recently created a strategic business partnership that opens a credit program for Wayfair Professional members (Rubenstein, 2022).

Business customers who are a part of this program can get a Wayfair Professional Credit Card with rewards and a Wayfair Professional Flex Account. Benefits of this program include extended payment terms, credit solutions, increased purchasing power and online account management tools (Rubenstein, 2022). Wayfair is sharing and creating this business partnership in order to strengthen their ecommerce business customer segment, making Capital One a perfect partnership, said Shawn Cunningham, Vice President for Capital One Trade Credit (Rubenstein, 2022).

Another integrated marketing strategy that Wayfair employs is their Wayfair Tech Blog. Here, the Wayfair technologists team have a platform to write about how the company is integrating into the tech world in a variety of ways. Wayfair claims that technology is at the center of everything they do (Ferrari, 2021). This blog allows for Wayfair to showcase how they are partnering with tech companies and innovating their company through technology. Wayfair could have hired independent journalists to write these blogs, but Wayfair's employees writing them shows how important direct communication with their customers is to the company. A huge part of IMC is building relationships with customers and looking at things from a customer's perspective (Breakenridge, 55).

**Community/Employee Relations**

Strong employee volunteer and community relations are integral to building a strong business foundation and a rich corporate culture. Wayfair is no stranger to establishing these essential practices into the framework of their corporation. While the company has several employee and community relations activities in place there remain a few that truly rise above the industry standard.

A clear example of this can be seen in Wayfairs' employee involvement with Winter Walk. At Wayfair's annual holiday party, employees were asked to bring winter weather items such as gloves and coats as well as were invited to contribute monetary donations. As a result of this, two hundred employees were able to allocate enough items to fill seven cars as well as raise over $3,000 in funds that will go directly to Winter Walk (About Wayfair, 2022). Winter Walk, a Boston based organization, is an initiative that raises support and awareness for homeless prevention. Most recently in 2022, the organization raised close to a million dollars which cements just how influential this organization is to the Greater Boston area (Winter Walk, 2022).

In addition to systemic issues such as homelessness, Wayfair also displays an awareness and dedication to current events and issues. This can be clearly seen in Wayfair's efforts in supporting Ukraine in the ongoing conflict. In partnership with Generus, a virtual volunteer tool, employees collaborated to effectively create handmade soaps and blankets for Ukrainian refugees who have been forced out of their homes. Due to their efforts, over two hundred and fifty employee-made products were shipped directly to the Ukraine-Poland border and effectively aided the refugees (About Wayfair).

It is clear that these activities follow industry standards and as a result display strong corporate values and an impactful employee culture.Through Wayfair's efforts it can be observed that they share similar values to Public Relations legend Al Golin. Through Wayfair's community involvement, the implementation of Golin's "Trust Bank" philosophy is clear. This phrase details the idea that companies have a long term commitment to their communities (Community Relations, 2022). Through Wayfair's community relations activities, it is clear to see that they are appropriate and influential to the company's culture and their internal and external audiences. This is exemplified by Wayfair's understanding needs of the community both locally and globally through their efforts in their Greater Boston Area "wayberhood" and overseas in Ukraine.

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