

Food Centre says damaging 'tweets' are a wake-up call to the power of social networking sites

False rumours about Ludlow reveal risks of malicious gossip on Twitter

By PATRICK MCGUIGAN

The risks that social networking websites can pose to a retailer's reputations were highlighted last month when the Ludlow Food Centre was the subject of a potentially damaging rumour on Twitter.

Several messages, or 'tweets', were posted on Twitter claiming that staff at the Shropshire food hall were to be laid off and the shop closed down to make way for a conference centre.

The rumour, which was completely untrue, was brought to the attention of MD Sandy Boyd by a local newspaper following up the information for a possible new story.

"It came completely out of the blue and it's been hard to find where the rumour started. We're not sure if it was just mistaken gossip or something more malicious," said Boyd. "We weren't previously on Twitter and dismissed it as silly chitchat, but there are millions of

people connected to it who could be busy gossiping about your business.

"I'd urge other retailers to look into what Twitter is about because it could be used against you. Unless you know how to deal with it you are at a disadvantage."

Ludlow moved quickly to counter the rumour, issuing a statement to the press and getting friends of the shop to post tweets denying the story. It has now also signed up with Twitter.

According to Victoria Prior, director of PR agency Magnolia, "prevention is the best course of action" when it comes to stopping negative messages appearing on Twitter and public review sites such as Qype.

"Control the information that's going out on networking sites, so if there is anything negative, it is outweighed by positive information that will hopefully encourage other positive tweets and



Businesses struck by negative comments on sites like Twitter must fight back with positive messages

comments," she told FFD.

"If someone decides to write something negative, first of all consider if they have a point and look at the issue. If you believe it to be wholly unfair, politely contact the host, but don't hold out too much hope of it being removed.

"To limit the damage ask those who do think more of you to log in and add other reviews and comments that are more glowing."

Newcastle-based deli Mmm... has used Twitter successfully to build its customer base, sending out regular tweets on new products, special offers and recipes to over 1,000 followers.

"It's a great tool for communicating with existing customers and we have attracted new people to the shop through the site," said owner Simone Clarkin.

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Seed oil producers defend Omega 3 claims against attack by Which?

The newly formed British Association of Cold Pressed Oil Producers (BACPOP) has hit back at allegations from consumer watchdog Which? that products containing plant-derived omega 3, such as rapeseed oil, are making misleading health claims.

The consumer group issued a statement last month outlining its opposition to new EC rules that allow products containing plant-derived Omega 3 oils, such as rapeseed oil, to bear the claim 'high in' or 'a source of' Omega 3s.

Which? said such claims are misleading because only oils from fish sources have been proven to keep our hearts healthy.

BACPOP, whose members make regular claims about the health benefits of their rapeseed oil, defended the use of plant-derived Omega 3, which is called ALA.

"Rapeseed oil has nearly 20



Plant-derived Omega 3 is as valuable as that found in fish oil, rapeseed producers insist

times the amount of ALA required to make a 'high in' claim under the new EC rules and can be metabolised by the body to form the long chain fatty acids you find in fish oil," said Graham Kelly, manager at BACPOP member Hill Farm Oil.

"There are benefits to both types of oils and it is misleading of Which? to say otherwise."

New gluten-free rules pose threat to smaller producers

The cost of conforming to new legislation on gluten-free product labelling could make it increasingly difficult for hard-pressed small producers to compete against industrial manufacturers and the supermarkets.

Specialist producers such as Scotland's Cookroom, which is focused on wheat- and gluten-free foods, fear they could face huge bills to get every product on their list individually tested.

At artisan bakery More? near Kendal, whose gluten-free Muddees brownies were named Supreme Champion at last year's Great Taste Awards, owner Patrick More told FFD: "The new rules mean we will have to send our products to be tested in a laboratory.

"Large manufacturers, who supply the supermarkets, have technical departments to deal with this and the extra costs will be a drop in the ocean for them. But for smaller gluten-free producers there's a danger we'll be priced out of the market."

Under new Codex guidelines, the gluten limit for products labelled as gluten-free has been lowered from 200 parts per million (ppm) to 20ppm. Products with gluten levels between 20-100ppm can be labelled 'low in gluten'.

Manufacturers have until January 2012

to meet the criteria, at which time an EU legal framework will take effect and the guidelines will be enforced by EHOs and trading standards officers.

Norma McGough, head of diet and health at Coeliac UK, said that food manufacturers should conduct an audit trail of their businesses, obtaining certification from suppliers to prove ingredients meet the new standards. They should also consider testing product samples for gluten levels. "How much testing you need to do really depends on the risks of contamination in your production facility," she said.

Lab tests to measure gluten content range in price from £55-£130 per sample at scientific analysis company RSSL.



Lab testing of gluten content can cost up to £130 per sample