

I R On the Internet... Catch them on the Net!

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There are two types of information regarding companies. 1) Official information as in the full version released by the company, and 2) write ups/opinions/reports written by a third party.

Both will impact readers, but if you are the company, the latter is out of your control.

For investors, accessing the Internet is typically the first of many steps before they make an investment decision. The reasons are obvious. To research a company, whether local or overseas, the Internet provides the most convenience. It is at one's fingertips, is easy enough to use, and it gives instant information gratification.

What meets the eyes of investors on the net, will influence their interests in the company that they are researching, and ultimately, their investment decisions. Given the weight and impact that the Internet has on investors, this channel of communication cannot be ignored, and should be treated with utmost respect. Companies owe it to themselves to leverage the power of the Internet to their advantage, in putting their best foot forward.

Let's concentrate on what is within your control, and how best to present your company to investors, on the Internet. It really is not that difficult. Here are some guidelines:

The more information, the merrier

Having said that, it has to be relevant information for investors. For instance, if you were in the market to buy an apartment, what type of information would you like to have before making that decision? It would be information about the property, its location, its price, the year it was built, its size, its floor plan, its tenants, its security, its facilities, its neighborhood...and the list goes on. Likewise, for investors to be interested in your company, they would need to know the business your company is in, its history, its achievement, where it is going, its prospects, how the company is run, who's running it, its corporate governance, financial status, financial performance, financial obligations, latest developments...to name a few.

Very often, the information is already available in your company, off line; it could be in your corporate brochure, annual reports, announcements you file with regulatory bodies or press releases. What you can do is to make that information available on the Internet, thus enabling investors to better understand your company.

Information should be easily accessible

The variety of information mentioned above is but a small sample of what your company can present, to help investors understand you. You can further enhance an investor's understanding by providing, for example, definition of industry jargons, financial glossary, market news of your industry...With so much information to present, one definitely needs to organize and index and put it in an easily comprehensible and logical layout, to ensure visitors can find the information quickly, taking the guesswork out.

One of the most frequent criticisms of corporate web sites, is their lack of clarity when directing investors to the information they need. With all good intentions and inclusion of a wide scope of information, what good is it if nobody can find it? You don't have to travel very far to 'bad-experience' the same for yourself: just access the net now and click on to some corporate web sites.

Keeping your web site updated

Say you have all the information nicely categorized, with clear signs and directions bringing investors to the sections/information they need, it would be a real damper if the information they find is out dated!

Not having the latest information on your web site is an absolute no-no. Why? Well, very simply, would you keep returning to the same news stand if it never carries today's newspaper, in the morning? With outdated information, you are training investors to stay away from your web site, and not the other way around; subjecting yourself then to information typically out of your control...and why would you want to do that?

Stretch your dollar - Publicise your web site

Consider the time and effort you took in building your web site and updating it...please don't skim on publicizing it. You can promote your web site both on and off line and remember to print your web site address on your stationery, brochures and name cards.

For online promotion, a link from the stock exchange web site is advisable; and promotion via a reputable, well established and specialized I R site for Asia Pacific companies, as in the author's irasia.com, is recommended.

Be at the right place

A corporate web site is essential, but it is not the only place where you should make your I R material available. You can further leverage the power of the Internet. Smart utilization is to be where you know the audience you want to reach, sophisticated investors, congregate.

Sophisticated investors do their own research. Their understanding of the company and confidence in the company's management, lends support to the growth of the company, potentially stabilising the share price and possibly adding a premium to it.

Fundamentally, what constitutes a good investment has not changed that much over time

There are a number of financial information channels used by professional and sophisticated investors. Provide further convenience to these investors by making your verbatim information available on these channels. This will increase the chance of your story, presented your way, being heard by investors. An analogy would be a bank making it more convenient for its customers to do banking transactions, via ATMs around the world, without having to visit the bank branch. By providing your information on appropriate channels, you are fulfilling the investors' needs, and to your advantage as well!

Fundamentally, what constitutes a good investment has not changed that much over time. If your company has a sound business model, good prospects, good management, good corporate governance, is one that allows investors to grow their wealth with, then practice good I R to convey your worth; and the Internet is the

channel you should use, to most effectively communicate with existing and potential investors.

I R on the Internet demonstrates a continuous willingness of a company to communicate with investors and portrays a high level of transparency. The Internet is open to the public, to those you know and those you do not know, and you never know who is watching. Profit from it!

About the author

Alison Chow is the CEO and co-founder of irasia.com, the first and only web site in the world specialised in publishing verbatim investor relations information, sourced direct from Asian Pacific listed companies.

Alison was an accountant in New York City, at PriceWaterhouse, before returning to her native Hong Kong in 1981, to become a foreign exchange dealer. Starting with Citibank, she later joined the treasury department of Union Bank of Switzerland and Bank Austria.

Alison graduated Cum Laude from Boston University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, and is a USA qualified Certified Public Accountant. She is a frequent conference speaker in Hong Kong, Sydney, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and China, sharing her expertise in merging Investor Relations with Internet technology. Alison has published articles on I R & Internet appearing in Reuter-Equities Quarterly, FinanceAsia I R Handbook 2002 to name a few. She is a Board member of the Investor Relations Association (Asia), and a member of the Organizing Committee of The Director Of The Year Awards 2002, 2003, organized by The Hong Kong Institute of Directors.

About irasia.com

Investor Relations Asia (www.irasia.com) offers Asian Pacific listed companies a definitive tool to distribute I R information to institutional, professional and retail investors.

Since 1996, I R Asia has become a favorite resource among the global investment community, because of the convenience offered by its consolidating information in a single location. This focused approach results in companies listed on I R Asia to be immediately visible to this important audience, with over 200,000 documents being accessed on I R Asia every day.

I R Asia has been commended, among others, by Forbes - Best of The Web, TIME, Asian Wall Street Journal and Far East Economic Review.

Serving clients spanning from China to Australia, with offices in Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney, I R Asia builds its clients' brand names to a target investment audience. Visit www.irasia.com and you will find the latest I R information, updated around the clock, as and when companies make them available. ■