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COMMENT

THE BIG PITCH

How should Oracle handle allegations that it spied on pro-Microsoft groups?



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So Larry ordered his company to do what every other big company in the world does – the only difference was that he got caught. Larry's always racing boats and flying his MiG, so he obviously likes adventure and sport, right? Oracle should organize the first-ever hi-tech "Corporate Spy Olympics." Get about 25 hi-tech companies and put together an entire day of contests, such as diving into a 40-foot-deep dumpster and attempting to recover one specific piece of financial data from the bottom. There should be a puzzle contest, where the teams have to find the remains of one shredded memo and put it back together in a specific amount of time. Then there should be an "avoid the guard" event, where you have to sneak into a building on a specific company's campus without getting caught.



Eric Yaverbaum
Jericho Communications
New York

If Larry Ellison knew that Oracle's Raymond Lane was going to be resigning when he did, why in the world would he have a press conference – which brought more attention to Oracle's use of an investigation service – when he did? If Ellison was thinking it would divert stockholders' attention from the fact that the guy widely credited for having rebuilt Oracle was leaving, it didn't. Instead, it made it a bigger story. Just look at the stock price. And why the classic "sending out of the release on a Friday of a holiday weekend" tactic? As Oracle moves forward, it needs to settle on key messages, as opposed to making hollow statements that no one will believe anyway. Also, the company should reconsider not replacing Lane; a solid replacement could help them put this episode behind them.



Brian Unger
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There is nothing Oracle's PR team can do in the immediate future – the knee-jerk reaction to start a warm, fuzzy program for the homeless or to fire off a bunch of press releases would be useless. Not only would it appear self-serving, it would *be* self-serving. Oracle needs to look at this incident as part and parcel of their whole corporate attitude, as well as Larry Ellison's image that he is above the law. The first thing the company needs to do is get out of the office and into the mountains with some great guru or some of the best communications experts to decide just who they are as a company. They also need to decide what their mission is, above and beyond beating Microsoft and becoming the biggest bully on the block. Until they get back to reality, no communications program will make a difference.



Geoff Geiger
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Larry Ellison has indicated no remorse, and chances are he would not welcome a "mea culpa" approach to the PR crisis. Yet even if he did, the crisis-communication mantra of "we're wrong, we're sorry, we won't do it again" would not suffice in this instance. Oracle's PR team should publicly explore the ethical issues that underlie this incident in a seminar entitled, "In a world of slimeballs, should you be one too?" They're in a touchy spot. I'd recommend they get Ellison and his executive team to look deeply at the kind of company they want to be and the world they want to inhabit. Such a long-term view may not be in the interests of tomorrow's headlines or stock prices, but it's the best PR course.