

NETBRIEF: Reputations At Risk
April 15, 2008

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Protests around the Olympic torch on its troubled way to Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games is prompting the Chinese government to seek out public relations help to improve its image. There are some things a public relations firm should not attempt, in this case trying to paste over a record of human rights violations. “Mission Accomplished” is another PR gaffe.

Companies with just as much to lose should not engage in PR unless there is a story to tell with some validity to it. Will the story hold up under scrutiny? Is there a positive track record of some length to support the story? Is there a third party endorsement? Are the company spokespeople experienced in delivering information to the media? Can they be persuaded to stop talking “off the record”? When a PR company is pitching and promising, think about what could go wrong before taking action. We live in an age where exposure is instantaneous, where mainstream media is increasingly hard-edged and unforgiving and the blogosphere loves to root out salacious details. As a fifth-generation company president said recently: “There are only two things we own – our inventory and our reputation.” Inventory can be replaced. A reputation cannot.

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