

# PRWeek

## OP-ED CEO's personal life tricky ground

In the weekend *Wall Street Journal*, you can find a pictorial tour of the homes of famous celebrities, including top CEOs. You can read about the top five CDs, movies, or TV shows, or see which executive has his or her property on the market. You can even get visibility for your CEO's philanthropic activities.

*The New York Times* recently ran a feature on CEO libraries. The story was the fourth most e-mailed by online readers.

On Valleywag, you can see pictures of Steve Jobs' car as it cruises down the freeway or read about the "hottest" eligible person in the Silicon Valley's tech industry.

To borrow an old ad slogan, this is not your father's business journalism. From the popular Valleywag blog to the weekend edition of the *Journal*, reporting on business has taken a turn toward celebrity-style journalism.

In the same way that today's sports media seem to focus as much on the off-the-field activities of pro athletes as the on-field exploits, the business media is drilling more deeply into what CEOs are doing outside the office.

Does this open up new opportunities for PR pros, or does it re-

quire you to keep an even tighter cloak around these executives? The answer is yes and yes. Celebrity-style business journalism opens up a host of opportunities. There now is likely to be interest in what the CEO wears, what he or she likes to eat, or listen to, or read, ad infinitum.

But you should ask yourself this:

### Reporting on business has turned toward celebrity-style journalism

If you gain visibility for some aspect of the CEO's personal life, does it advance the goals you are trying to reach with your PR efforts? What's in it for the business?

If you determine there is no benefit to opening the front door to the CEO's personal life, then avoid these opportunities, watch the types of events the CEO speaks at or attends, and closely observe the interviews the CEO does. Once that door is open, it is

almost impossible to close it.

Remember that what the CEO says or does is likely to end up being written about somewhere. If it's done with a strategic purpose, this can be a good thing; but if it's done carelessly, it could be a disaster. Given the fierce competition that exists for the best, most interesting business information, everything and everyone is fair game.

A recent research paper authored by two college professors, Ulrike Malmendier of the University of California, Berkeley, and Geoffrey Tate of UCLA, suggests that the CEO-superstar culture, partially created by the new business media, can be a distraction and lead to companies underperforming. That's another reason to carefully consider your CEO media plan.

Seeking outside advice in handling celebrity-type opportunities is highly recommended. In the same way an accounting firm hires a third-party firm to audit its books, corporations should consider engaging with an outside communications firm to help determine the value of these opportunities. ■

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