

Your Reputation is Your Business

What links Rupert Murdoch with Wicked? No, I am not making a blunt comment on the media mogul's character. The connection, in the words of former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, is "Events, dear boy. Events."

The Events surrounding the phone hacking scandal affecting News International are the ongoing subject of national television news and newspaper front page stories and are well known.

Less well known is the recent incident at the West End theatre showing the production Wicked. The Morris family down from Scotland took their 12 year old autistic son to see Wicked. The theatre management believed that the son was making too much noise and after initially being asked to move behind a glass screen, the boy with his family was subsequently ejected from the theatre.

Wicked is a story of victimisation and Mr Morris feels that is what the theatre has shown to his son. He has launched a Facebook group called "Wicked Discrimination".

The trouble with Events is that they can come apparently from nowhere. However when they come, the damage to reputation can be so great as to have the potential to seriously damage the business concerned.

In the case of The Ambassador Theatre Group, which owns the theatre, it has responded rapidly by issuing an apology to the Morris family. It is to be seen whether that is sufficient to deal with this Event. For Rupert Murdoch and News International, facing a far greater crisis, it remains to be seen whether the closure of the News of the World and the departure of several senior executives is enough to address their Event or whether this Event is still unfolding.

As the then Chief Executive of News International, Rebekah Brooks emailed her staff on 30 June (as reported in Private Eye no.1294) to state that ? "I want both internal and external acknowledgement that we have done the right thing by facing up to our responsibilities where things have gone wrong, and having done our utmost to correct them."

An ongoing aspect of doing the right thing was that Ms Brooks herself left News International a few weeks later. However, her statement succinctly summarises the challenge which faces organisations which need to protect and even sometimes re-establish their reputation if they are to save their business.

Events can touch all businesses, large and small. While struggling with the whirlwind of fast moving events, which can bring with them a very varied range of risks of a legal, financial and PR nature, the company still has to keep the ordinary day to day business going. As a ship's captain takes on board a pilot to steer the ship safely into a strange port, so Businesses often look at short notice for their own pilots in the face of Events.