

Tesla turns Twitter into \$44 billion communications apparatus

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Before Elon Musk was cutting deep at Twitter, inspiring legions of Silicon Valley bosses to take more unsparing approaches to running their companies, the chief executive officer of Tesla swung the ax on the car

company's small public relations team.

It was late 2019, and Tesla had just steered through a rough patch of production hell, executive departures and self-inflicted crises. Dissolving the PR department was a risky move for a company that relied on [media coverage](#) as a primary driver of sales leads and thumbed its nose at traditional advertising.

It worked out fine for Tesla shareholders, at least for a time. The company opened its massive plant in Shanghai, launched the Model Y and meme stocked its way to a more than \$1 trillion valuation. Its CEO became the richest man on the planet.

Then, Musk offered \$44 billion to Twitter just as the Federal Reserve was beginning to pull away the punch bowl. Musk sold billions of dollars worth of Tesla stock to help fund the purchase, and the carmaker's shares plunged 65% in 2022.

Many Tesla shareholders understandably haven't been big fans of the Twitter deal, and some have even called for Musk to revive the carmaker's PR department. Instead, Tesla has been stepping up its activity on Twitter.

The @Tesla account is still nowhere near as prolific as @elonmusk, but the pickup is conspicuous. Some posts even look an awful lot like the 30-second car commercials Musk used to regard as wastes of time and resources that would be better spent on improving product.

Rather than put out a [press release](#) or blog post on taking over the former home of HP and turning the site into its global engineering headquarters, Tesla posted a tweet last month giving the world an hour's notice that Musk and Governor Gavin Newsom would be making an announcement. Tesla then broadcast the remarks on Twitter, posted job openings and

streamed the opening party.

Stepping up Tesla's presence on Twitter could play a small part in driving the engagement Musk will need to turn the latter business around. He said last week that Twitter may avoid burning cash next quarter, which would be a welcome development for Tesla shareholders who won't want him selling any more stock in the carmaker to keep his debt-laden social [media company](#) afloat.

But stepping up its game on Twitter hasn't been a panacea for Tesla's communications. The carmaker released few details about the California engineering headquarters, and some news outlets got the nuance wrong. Tesla never moved its engineering base out of Golden State and wasn't moving its global headquarters back from Texas. A day after its announcement, Tesla sent a clarifying tweet.

In a sage response to investors concerned about the bench behind Musk, Tesla put 16 executives on stage alongside him at its recent investor day. But after months of consternation about his level of focus on Tesla, a skilled team of PR people may have advised Musk against tweeting about the war in Ukraine and Keith Olbermann during the almost four-hour affair.

Communications professionals might also have warned that staging such an event without any new models might be a bit of a letdown.

More than two weeks since investor day, Tesla fans are still waiting on the detailed white paper laying out the calculations and assumptions behind its roadmap for transitioning Earth to sustainable energy. If the last few months is any guide, they'll know where to find it.

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