

12 Disastrous Marketing and Communication Blunders

Email Blunder

In July 2001, the pharmaceutical corporation, Eli Lilly sent a mass email to all the users of its anti-depressant Prozac. Unfortunately the writer of the mail didn't use the 'bcc' function on email to hide the addressees from each other. In seconds Lilly had published its entire mailing list of Prozac users.

The Lesson: Avoid a depressing mistake. Your customer's privacy is king.

Communications Blunder

When Gerber started selling baby food in Africa, they used the same packaging as in the US, with the beautiful baby on the label. Later they learned that in Africa, companies routinely put pictures on the label to describe the contents inside, since most people can't read English.

The Lesson: When exporting products, research the language and culture of those you are marketing to, and adjust your message accordingly.

Direct Mail Blunder

Lawyers are by nature cautious, so what was business litigation firm Quinn Emanuel thinking when it allowed a "Business is war" technology-targeted marketing campaign, which sent fake hand grenade paperweights through the mail? "Our marketing consultant told us this is Silicon Valley, they're youthful, kind of aggressive, edgy, this is an effective promotion to do," a senior partner said. When the bomb squad was called in at two locations it turned out to be a dud of an idea.

The Lesson: Gimmicks more often blow up in your face, than succeed.

Slogan Blunders

As the SARS super-pneumonia swept Hong Kong, the local tourist board continued to use the slogan, "Hong Kong will take your breath away." A few years ago there was a mini-epidemic in Virginia in which 7 or 8 people caught typhus from seafood prepared at a fast-food restaurant. Even a week later, the chain's billboards still said "Catch Our Shrimp Salad."

The Lesson: Stay on top of news and issues in your market area. They could affect your public relations efforts, either negatively or positively.

Branding Blunder

Two days before Valentine's Day, Mattel announced that its iconic Barbie doll was breaking up with Ken, her beau of 43 years. That, coupled with Mattel's decision to make teen performer Hillary Duff—whose box office proved less than mighty--the brand's spokesperson, contributed to a 13% decline in third-quarter Barbie sales.

The Lesson: If your branding and market position isn't broken, don't fix it.

Public Relations Blunder

Salvation Army bell ringers with collection kettles outside department stores have been around for a century. So, when US-based Target announced it would ban Salvation Army collectors at all its stores to reduce solicitation requests, outraged consumers called for a national boycott. "The bell ringers remind you of the meaning of Christmas, that it's about love, caring, and giving," said shopper Phyllis McElaney. In response, retail rival Wal-Mart offered to match its customer donations to the red kettles at all the retailer's locations.

The Lesson: If handled carefully, your competition's public relations blunders can be used to your advantage.

Media Blunder

Saying the wrong things to the press offers can dramatically affect marketing campaigns. Take the comments of Peter Main, Nintendo's marketing exec when he spoke to the San Francisco Chronicle: "No one will deny that Sony is a world-class hardware company, and no one will deny that Microsoft is a world-class software company. Nintendo aspires to be neither one of those things."

The Lesson: Think before you speak – especially to the media.

Promotion Blunder

IUMA.com, an alternative-music portal, took branding a step too far by bribing parents to name their newborn children "Iuma." While admittedly

IUMA is not a bad name at all \$5,000 cash is not nearly enough to overcome the stigma of having one's identity ruffled off in infancy.

The Lesson: Guerrilla marketing tactics can offend. Ensure you look at the potential negative publicity when embarking on these kinds of campaigns.

Product Name Blunder

Is Touareg a bad name for Volkswagen's new sport-utility? VW probably believed the Touareg name would conjure up visions of a harsh breed of people with the ability to survive in an inhospitable environment. The perfect image for a rough and tumble off-road vehicle. But in fact, Touareg implies "political rebellion by a stateless, Kurd-like tribe whose name literally means 'abandoned by God,' " says your Dictionary.com.

The Lesson: When it comes to product names, do your research.

Customer Relations Blunder

When Bridgestone Corp. ordered a voluntary recall of 6.5 million potentially defective tires on August 9, the Japanese-owned company's CEO did not make public appearances to apologize. Instead, the company tried to deflect blame to drivers for their driving habits and to its customer, Ford, for its under-inflation tire maintenance recommendations. The tire defects purportedly caused well over 100 deaths and resulted in at least 200 personal injury lawsuits. Bridgestone, Firestone's parent company publicly denied product problems and customer complaints while trying quietly to solve the trouble.

The Lesson: Mistakes happen, but it's how you deal with the bad publicity aftermath that really counts.

Trademark Blunder

New Zealand's farmers remember the mistake they made the first time they brought the country's unique kiwifruit plants to the United States. American, Chilean, and Italian farmers snapped them up started growing kiwis themselves, under priced New Zealand's fruit, and stole the North American market, now worth \$90 million. Adding insult to injury, the growers also kept the name, which New Zealand growers had failed to trademark even though it is the nickname for New Zealanders themselves (after their hairy, flightless national bird). Says Arama Kukutai, the regional

director for the country's trade ministry; "It's quite possibly the worst branding disaster in New Zealand's history."

The Lesson: If you have developed a great product, protect it in every way you can.

Writing Blunders:

"Mixing bowl set designed to please a cook with round bottom for efficient beating."

"Dinner Special -- Turkey \$2.35; Chicken or Beef \$2.25; Children \$2.00"

The Lesson: It pays to hire a professional copywriter!

Source: Internet