

**Marketing Messages****MARY CHARLESON*****Big, battered, bruised & back for more: Learning from social media mistakes of big global brands***

They're big, battered, bruised and back for more. What can we learn from the social media mistakes of big global brands? Lots. Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have 1.2 billion combined users. That's a lot of influence for media vehicles that didn't exist prior to 2005. And that doesn't even include the countless blogs and other social media tools and apps out there. Simply put, the marketplace has the ability to correct wrongs now like no other time in history. Stumbles can be summarized in three areas:

1. Connect and amplify: Social media gives customers the ability to connect with others who are sharing similar problems, and to then amplify their concerns online. It would seem that airlines have fallen from grace repeatedly here, but any company in the business of providing a service to large numbers of customers should be wary. JetBlue Airlines created their own hostage crisis (never a good word in the airline industry) on Feb 14, 2007 (Valentines Day, not a good day to say "we don't love you"), when passengers were stranded for 11 hours in a plane on the tarmac. Several filmed their experience on cell phones. One started a blog. It went viral. What ensued were groups of passengers who started sharing their experiences with delays and poor treatment.

In February 2010, Southwest Airlines removed a customer from a flight because he was taking up more space than the one seat they had paid for. Admittedly large, Kevin Smith was outraged. He took to blogging and tweeting his experience. Perhaps Southwest should have checked his "online influence" before hastily removing him, since Kevin was a US filmmaker with considerable followers and media ties. Couple that with an empathetic US population where many are overweight, and the potential to connect and amplify was immense - to pardon the pun.

When United Airlines trashed Dave Carroll's guitar through mishandling it, he was unsuccessful in getting compensation and finally turned his frustration into a song and video that became a Youtube sensation. His experience united numerous others who chimed in with similar stories of mishandled and damaged luggage. Over 13.7 million viewed his videos.

2. Highlight hidden problems: Beware the security camera, especially when they are in the hands of every single one of your customers poised to instantly share your company indiscretions online with millions. That's the lesson learned by FedEx when a video of an employee tossing a package over a fence rather than delivering it to the door, went viral on Youtube. Can we assume the employee couldn't read that the package was a computer monitor? Both the video and the customer's plight of having the damaged product replaced haunted FedEx online for months. It also spawned a plethora of 'me too' videos with countless more customers sharing similar experiences.

3. Creative misfires: Sometimes social media can be a big think tank to correct ill thought out creative platforms. When Motrin launched their commercial for pain relief, targeted at new Mom's during national baby carrying week, they didn't anticipate a backlash against the creative theme that poked fun at them feeling "tired and crazy." But offend it did. Boycotts were arranged and ad parodies posted. It wasn't until the story hit mainstream media that the ad was pulled. Johnson & Johnson was not monitoring social media at the time. Earlier this year, Kimberly-Clark, the makers of Huggies diapers, met the wrath of Dads, tired of being portrayed as incompetent dumb fathers, with a commercial to show a diaper meant to rise to the ultimate challenge of not being changed for hours, in the "Huggies Dad test." While women may have found the commercial funny, arguably the growing number of Dad's engaged in parenting should have lead the company to consider the shifts that have taken place in their target market, and to consider the creative accordingly.

There are really three lessons to be learned here.

1. If you fail to understand your target market, social media will let you know. Do your research.
2. If you have core business service problems they need to be solved. If you don't they will blow up online.
3. Don't play in social media unless you are going to monitor and manage feedback. Dedicate resources and do it well. Two tools worth considering are: [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts) and [www.socialmention.com](http://www.socialmention.com). With Google alerts you will receive an email when any of your watchwords, such as business or brand name are mentioned in social media. With Social Mention you can receive a report with links to any current social media activity on your watchwords. It also provides a rudimentary valuation of the mention being positive, negative or neutral.

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