

The Big P

Is all publicity good publicity? This question had me pondering the big 'p' question today when first thing this morning Sunrise ran an interview with an advertising expert about Coles' new, widely mocked television advertisement. You know the one, featuring the very un-dulcet tones of semi-hunky chef, Curtis Stone and ex-rocker, Normie Rowe. In my view, the advertisement is a shocker – but already successful in the way so many people are talking about it – and if you viewed the ad, like me, would now know there are no hormones in meat purchased from Coles. That's a good thing, yes? Would you stop shopping at Coles? No. So, what is Coles to do? This is where their strategic communicators come into play that with expert management, that will convert a bad tune into increased meat sales, pronouncing the campaign an all out success. Without thinking too much about it, first thing I would do, is get singing lessons for Curtis – then pull the ad. Job done.

Perhaps the greatest flop in recent times was the pr company who mailed – and killed – 50 goldfish in a pr stunt gone wrong. The consultancy packaged and sent 55 goldfish in a bowl accompanied by a note saying: 'be the big fish in a small pond and come and test the water'. This was a promo to encourage media agencies to promote South Australia. Perhaps if the fish had lived, it would have been perceived and received positively. Unfortunately they took a risk and it was an epic fail. Will it kill South Australia? Of course not, but don't be surprised if the pr company gets axed. Point to note: publicity stunts are fun and a great way of grabbing attention – just be careful to weigh up positives with negatives and assess potential risk.

Then there was Qantas's hashtag disaster in November. After months of industrial disputes culminating in the grounding of Qantas' fleet on October 29, the pr team operating the twitter account, @QantasAirways, made a call for luxury flying experiences with the hashtag #QantasLuxury. Entrants were asked to get creative and the winning tweet would receive a luxury Qantas amenities kit. Well, within an hour the hashtag was trending across the country (a great response) but the ferocious nature and number of entries was not quite what management expected. Apparently this was all part of a social media strategy – gone wrong! They obviously

forgot all about the timing and the effect just seemed to compound people's negative opinion of Qantas.

Publicity is great when it works in your favour, when it is strategic, positive and well aligned. However, I am finding it hard to agree with the sweeping statement that all publicity, good and bad, is good. You only have to look at how bad publicity can put an instant end to people's careers or damage sales and reputations. Look at companies like Sizzler, Evian, Panadol – they have all generated negative publicity for spoilage or poisoning. This has been catastrophic to the brand at the time, but in all cases, the companies mentioned have been able to claw their way back from the mire with strong communication.

Singing superstars like Michael Jackson, Boy George and George Michael have perhaps not been so successful at managing their image with a succession of bad publicity about bizarre or seedy behaviour – true or not. Yet there are always exceptions. I wonder if Chris Smith's sales plummeted after publicity arising from Rihanna's black eye. It really depends on the public's perceptions and expectations. For instance, we expect our cricketing legend, Shane Warne to misbehave and oddly enough, we love him for it. We eat up the controversy some people in the public eye court, take Pamela Anderson and her sex tapes as another example – you really cannot say this has done her any harm.

So, is all publicity, good publicity? I guess if it is intelligent. And I have to agree with Oscar Wilde in his belief that the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about or the very astute observation by Irish Republican and 'drinker with a writing problem', Brendan Behan who adapted the expression 'there's no such thing as bad publicity except your own obituary'.

Publicity: information that concerns a person, group, event, or product that is disseminated through various media to attract public notice.

Public Notice: Why attract publicity or public notice? Most, if not all of my clients have contracted me to generate publicity for themselves, their product or service – to make more sales. No one can buy from you if they don't know you exist!

Ideally, publicity should be favourable: It makes sense that the publicity generated is positive, however there are always exceptions to any rule.

Stay in control: Publicity needs to be well managed and controlled. After all, reputations and sales are at stake.

Take a comprehensive approach: When planning your publicity strategy, don't put all your eggs in one basket – look to all media – radio, television, print, social media and bloggers.

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