



Marketing Matters

By Richard D. Czerniawski

AVOIDING ERRORS THAT COULD BRING YOUR BRAND DOWN

Let's reflect upon and talk about the king's recent misstep. No, I'm not singling out any one monarch of a specific country. Au contraire, I'm referring to the self-proclaimed king of, all things, the hamburger. This article is about Burger King.



I come not to condemn nor bury the Burger King. Many are leading this charge via social media. Why? The king committed a faux pas, one (I firmly believe) not intended to offend but did so to a large segment of those who potentially are among his reign—women. You see, on International Women's Day, when we honor the role of women and celebrate the advances they've made in overcoming obstacles, the king issued the following proclamation:



What!?! Is the king dragging women back to a diminished role in society? Second citizen status? Worse yet, subjugation? Quite predictably and understandably, protests and denunciations sprang immediately, calling for the king's head. Down with the king! Women and their champions had a legitimate beef (forgive me this pun, will you?), one they wanted the king to eat—his words, that is.

There are essential learnings for each of us marketers from the king's error if we want to avoid it. Here they are for your consideration:

1. **Provide needed context** – The proclamation was designed to be, what's called by the digital social-creative literati, a "thumb stopper." However, it was a "thumb instigator," provoking women to take riotous social media action. Every print message needs to identify, clarify, and, most times, quantify. The headline serves to identify. The sub-head (or visual) to clarify (the headline). The body copy to quantify. The king identified but failed to clarify—provide context—which led to misunderstanding. If we don't provide context, our target audience will create their own. We're gambling that they'll see it the same way we do. It's not a gamble we should entertain. Burger King's "would be" clarification is that they're championing women's ascendancy in professional kitchens, where they are unduly and significantly underrepresented. Specifically, they are offering H.E.R. (Helping Equalize Restaurants) scholarships to put more women in "professional kitchens" (fine dining, award-winning kitchens, etc.) as chefs. In other words, the king is not looking to put women down but to advance them. A righteous ambition.



2. **Choose the media vehicle and format you need to effectively tell your story** – Notice, the print ad tells the complete story. The headline identifies. The first paragraph clarifies. The third paragraph quantifies. The fourth paragraph identifies and clarifies what Burger King is doing. Don't unduly restrict yourself to mediums where you cannot communicate a compelling (i.e., driving line-of-sight sales impact) message. While we marketers may conclude a particular vehicle is efficient (because of its lower costs), true efficiency comes from effectiveness—getting more bang for our buck (or whatever the unit of currency).

3. ***Translate your messaging to other media vehicles to fit the medium precisely*** – In re-examining the tweet, Burger King may have omitted the period (which is a cold, final stop for the reader) and substituted “...” for it! They may have invited readers to go to their website or ads appearing in various publications (similar to what pharmaceutical brands do) for the complete story. They could have even added a clarification in the tweet (e.g., “We’re providing scholarships to advance women’s role as chefs.”).
4. ***Avoid playing cutesy*** – The goal is not to be cute. Yes, we should strive for a "creative twist." In a short print ad, the creative twist is either in the headline or visual (never both!). It must be in the headline in a long print ad, which it is in the full-page ad. There is no creative twist in the Burger King tweet. It's the king playing cutesy. I imagine the advertisers applauded themselves for being so very clever with their proclamation. It reminds me of a story I heard about Jeff Bezos when he was a young boy of about 9 or 10. On a road trip down to Florida with his grandparents, young Jeff navigated them point by point, calculating gas mileage. (I did the same when I was a boy of the same age with my grandparents and grand uncle and aunt.) Jeff's grandmother was a smoker. Jeff calculated the number of years of life her smoking was robbing her. When he announced his forecast, his grandmother broke down crying. His grandfather took Jeff aside and told him, "Jeff, sometimes it's better to be kind than clever."
5. ***Practice empathy and verify*** – We have to walk in our target customer’s shoes. We need to get below the surface of the data (what)—the customer's skin—to understand the "why." We need to know the target so well that we can predict how s/he will respond to a piece of stimulus (which very few marketers can do accurately). Everything we put out into the market is stimulus. Burger King was gob-smacked by the response. Obviously, they did not know how women might respond to their tweet. In today’s acutely sensitive and hyper-reactive world, we need to be aware of how our message comes across and its impact on our brands. Customers aren’t going to ask us for clarification. They’re going to react. We want a specific, predictable response, not a reaction. You may trust your judgment but make sure you verify. Do a test run to avoid being gob-smacked.

As on the playing field, we need to create big plays to win in marketing. However, among equals, the team that makes the fewest mistakes often avoids losing. If you want to make your brand a perennial winner, read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. It will provide you with a list of common marketing errors to avoid and, importantly, effective ways to make your marketing matter more. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Peace and best wishes,





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