



Image: Web

Checking Ourselves

By: Anthony Bubel

While the old saying of 'No publicity is bad publicity' still rings a certain shade of true in today's business environment, marketers of late have been trying as hard as possible to prove it wrong. Three particular marketing efforts of the past few months are leaving the discipline in a rather negative state, causing us to wonder just how far is too far.

Dr. Pepper recently staged a promotion that hid several valuable coins throughout different parts of the country. For the Boston portion of the contest, a clue suggested that the winning coin was buried in a local cemetery. The cemetery, a historic site aged 347 years, was home to the remains of several of our nation's icons, including John Hancock, Paul Revere, and Samuel Adams.

Eager contestants showed up at the cemetery to begin digging up the cemetery, possibly unearthing the remains of some of our nation's most historic ancestors. The city of Boston managed to close the cemetery in time, while Cadbury Schweppes (who makes Dr. Pepper) rescinded the contest from the area.

A few weeks earlier, Boston was the home to another marketing blunder with terrorist implications. In order to promote the Cartoon Network show Aqua Teen Hunger Force, several blinking signs were placed around the city. As a result, Boston police was forced on high alert, closing bridges and major highways over concern that the signs were, in fact, bombs, in lieu of a potential terrorist attack.

The most tragic of the recent marketing bumbles came when a Sacramento, California radio station (KDND 107.9) held the "Hold Your Wee for a Wii" contest

which had participants drink inordinate amounts of water in order to vie for a Nintendo Wii. Jennifer Strange, the victim, just wanted to have the video game system to give her kids. Excerpts from the broadcast, which quickly surfaced on the internet, are as haunting as they are disturbing.

There is obviously reason for concern. The aforementioned recent marketing campaigns have resulted in near-defacement of national treasures, a terrorist scare in a post 9/11 world and a tragic, unnecessary death on account of gross negligence.

So what happens now? It's not outrageous to claim that marketing is a discipline that serves well as a typical scapegoat for some of contemporary societal issues; you've heard all of the criticisms of advertising and its 'negative' effects on culture and consumers alike. This time, however, objections could not be more appropriate.

The motives are understandable from a marketing perspective. Marketers need to be creative in the contemporary media when attempting to cut through all of the noise and other brand messages that flood consumers' daily lives. But, regardless of personal views, there are ethical standards that must guide campaigns.

As many of our members are nearing graduation, it is inevitable that many of them will land in places where decisions - such as the aforementioned debacles - will be made according to their judgement. Just remember that there is a line between creativity and stupidity. If your customers begin digging up the bones of George Washington, check yourself.

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The Temple University Chapter of the American Marketing Association is one of the largest Student Professional Organizations within the Fox School of Business & Management. TU-AMA is devoted to promoting the marketing discipline and providing all the resources necessary for its members to succeed in the professional world.

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