



#BrandFailures Are Epidemic on Twitter, So Stop With the Q&As

Why Do Brands Keep Risking Their Reputations with Twitter Town Halls?

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Recently, brands encouraging consumers to engage in Q&As with them have been experiencing entirely predictable wrath -- begging the question: What did they expect?

Looking at some recent epic Twitter Q&A #Fails, it seems clear that brands should stop risking their reputations by asking people to tweet them love messages. Because really, that's what I believe the social media teams thought they'd get when they opened Q&As on Twitter.

The truth is: Twitter's easy avenue of communication with consumers is fraught with danger for brands. Some examples:

NFL: Beaten

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's recent Twitter festival went horribly wrong, when he invited fans to ask him anything, using the hashtag #AskCommish.

Not surprisingly, he didn't answer any of these tweets:

"How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if he weren't suffering traumatic brain injuries from 12 years as an NFL linebacker?" #AskCommish

"Would you call a native American a Redskin to his face?" #AskCommish

Chicago Transit: Run over

The Chicago Transit Authority's recent Q&A went sour quickly.

Seems they've been having some problems with the rollout of a new Ventra payment system for riders. The Authority said they'd take questions on Twitter about the transition to the new system,

with the hashtag #AskVentra.

Among the responses: "@VentraChicago: What kind of mammal came up with your plan: meerkat, poop-flinging monkey, or drunk toddler? #AskVentra" and "#AskVentra How do commuter tears taste?"

However, if you ask me, the most mysterious quote of all was from CTA spokeswoman Tammy Chase, who called the chat a success, and said the authority was "pretty pleased."

NYPD: Shot down

In April, the NYPD's Twitter chat backfired, big-time, when it asked Twitterers to post pictures of themselves with police officers, using the hashtag #MyNYPD. OK, now, take a wild guess at what happened.

"Here's #MyNYPD arresting war veterans at a war memorial," wrote one tweeter, who identified herself as an activist and photographer.

Another tweeter asked "How bout featuring the one of the #NYPD with the 84 yo man they brutalized for jaywalking?" accompanied by a photo of a handcuffed senior citizen with blood running down his face.

NYC Police Commissioner Bill Bratton made light of the negative avalanche of tweets. "The big brouhaha, to use that Boston term, most of those photos that I looked [at], they're old news, they've been out there for a long time..."

And so maybe he thought they would have gone away by now? (Dear Commissioner Bratton: What goes online, stays online.)

British Gas: Frozen out

British Gas incurred the public's wrath in a Q&A session held just after the weather turned cold last October, which was shortly after they increased the bills of 7.8 million homes in Britain by 9.2%

British Gas asked the public to direct any questions to its customer services director Bert Pijls with the hash-tag #AskBG. They got an earful:

"Will you pass on the cost savings from firing your social media team to customers #AskBG"

JP Morgan: Scorned

Then there was the now infamous JP Morgan Twitter Q&A, which began with the tweet:

"It's a #TwitterTakeover: We'll host our 1st live Q&A on leadership & career advice w/a leading JPM exec on 11/14. Use #AskJPM to submit a Q"

Nobody seemed to notice that tweet, but when a reminder tweet was issued a week later, all hell broke loose. Within 24 hours, there were 18,669 tweets using the #AskJPM hashtag, and none of

them were kind.

Twitter users around the world hijacked the hashtag, blasting the bank's behavior and ethics (or lack thereof):

"Did you have a specific number of people's lives you needed to ruin before you considered your business model a success?" #AskJPM"

"Do your clothes fit better since you don't have the added weight of a soul? #AskJPM"

"Can I have my house back? #AskJPM"

Realizing that the Twitter experiment had turned into a monster they could not beat, JP Morgan quickly called off the second day of the Q&A with the tweet:

"Tomorrow's Q&A is cancelled. Bad idea. Back to the drawing board."

Thousands of bloggers and Dead Tree Media have since rehashed the debacle.

But really, why would any of these responses be surprises? And why would it take so many brands so long to realize their #Hashtag would be hijacked?

Some say the internet has gotten meaner, and perhaps it has. But if you ask me (no, this won't be a Q&A), every one of these results was entirely predictable.

For better or for worse, there is not one brand so beloved that it doesn't have a single snarky and dissatisfied customer, employee, supplier or journalist who'll be happy to have a forum.

Brands people love will find customers coming to their defense. But that's not the scenario most brands can expect.

So, a word of advice to brands: If you don't want to get trashed in social media, don't treat people like trash in the real world.

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