

What to do when your brand is trending for the wrong reasons

The advent of social media technology has made it easy for brands to be attacked and trend for all the wrong reasons. In such cases, brands seldom have insight on what to do when they trend because of negative publicity.



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Mkhuseli Vangile, MD of The Dynaste Communications Firm, says that it is very important for brands to have a crisis communication policy in place. This will be the first thing to look at when your brand trends for the wrong reasons.

“In PR and marketing, there are three types of media. There is earned media, controlled media and paid media. Earned media is getting brand awareness without paying for advertisement. An example of this includes news articles in papers and magazines about your company that you did not pay for,” says Vangile.

Vangile adds that your brand can be a viral sensation for bad reasons that taint the image of the brand; a simple retweet can spread like a stain, making your brand a controversial topic.

Here are ways to control negative publicity on social media...

Crisis communication policy

Refer back to the crisis communication policy which should be in existence before the crisis. It will help your brand to come up with tactics to handle the current crisis

Acknowledgement

Your social media team should not engage or comment on the matter immediately, they must wait until the company has an official statement around this. The only social media post being sent during the early stage of your brand trending is just to acknowledge the situation and further say you are in the investigating process, further developments will be communicated in due time. Engaging without coming up with a plan will only make your brand trends longer.

Select your crisis committee

Call all relevant parties within and outside of your organisation, to get to the bottom of the issue. Depending on the severity of the situation but for a big issue like an executive sexually assaulting a junior staff member would require a special crisis centre where your legal department, reputation managers like The DCF, your HR manager, social media manager and other executive members will sit until they come up with a plan.

In this example, they will not sit to find ways to defend the executive that assaulted the staff members but to come up with a plan to show their stakeholders, including those who are engaging the brand on social media, how strong their policies are to handle such behaviour and that their workspace has no room for sexual assault.

Official response

At this stage, you have done your investigation, you sat down with all relevant stakeholders and came up with a way to position your brand in a good light without shifting the blame and also without accepting the blame for something your brand did not do.

Your brand is at the centre of attention, use this to show your potential investors, potential employees, potential clients that you have good systems and great values in place. Send an official response that highlights all potential questions that can be asked when it is posted online

Do not engage

All questions must be answered but not trolls. If questions asked have been answered in your official statement, refer enquiries to the statement. Train your social media team on what to answer and what not to answer. Importantly, train them to always refer tough questions to the relevant person selected at the crisis committee.

“You don’t deal with a crisis when there is a crisis, you must deal with it before it even arrives. We live in a time where brands can trend simply because an employee is wearing a brand company T-shirt and engages in conflict outside of work. It is very crucial to develop a crisis communication policy while things are still going well. Companies like The DCF exist to help with such”, concludes Vangile.