

3 crisis management steps to protect influencers from reputational damage

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Since Balenciaga launched its holiday horror "Gift Collection" advertising campaign featuring disturbing images of young children, public anger has not abated.



Source: www.unsplash.com

This is despite the company immediately removing the images from its social media and issuing multiple apologies for their grievous errors which hypersexualised young children.

Due to her delayed response and refusal to cut ties with Balenciaga, Kim Kardashian's personal brand has taken a severe knock simply by association.

As a long-time brand ambassador for the company, Kardashian wore a stand-out faceless Balenciaga gown to the 2021 Met Gala and even walked the runway for their July fashion show in Paris. Although she had no input into this particular campaign's faux pas, it was inevitable that audiences would look to her to condemn the campaign and take a firm stance against the sexualisation of children and child pornography.

Instead, her poor crisis planning, and weak responses have received widespread criticism, enveloping her in the ongoing

public backlash.

So, while many have spoken about the potential dangers of influencer marketing, what should you do when it is the other way around, and your personal brand as an influencer is negatively impacted by the actions of others?

1. Check your values

Balenciaga is hardly a stranger to controversy, responsible for memorable campaigns such as Crocs shoes with high heels and selling severely tattered sneakers for \$1,850.

Having worked extensively with Balenciaga in the past and knowing its penchant for creating a stir, Kardashian should have been better prepared for this situation. As a brand ambassador, it's vital to ensure that companies are aligned with your own morals and values – which is why you need to spend some time on self-reflection and do your research before entering a relationship.

Then, understanding the risks, it's important to develop a proactive crisis strategy that outlines your possible responses to various scenarios. With proper planning in place, you will be far more prepared to react at the first sign of trouble rather than being caught like a deer in the headlights.

Unfortunately, a full week went by before Kardashian finally issued a response, by which time media had already begun to speculate on her sudden silence, and social media audiences had been whipped into a state of fury.

2. Don't wait – speak

Closely following the point above, speed is critical to crisis responses. There's an old formula which states that the intensity of a crisis is determined by the importance of a subject and ambiguity or uncertainty.

By ambiguity and uncertainty, we mean that every second that goes by without a response further flames the intensity and fall-out of a crisis, giving stories the time needed to take on a life of their own.

When Kardashian did finally respond, she stated that she had first wanted an opportunity to speak to Balenciaga's team to understand how the campaign could have happened.

Instead of waiting and appearing indifferent to the unfolding disaster, she should have immediately consulted a crisis communications consultant. An experienced practitioner could have helped craft a statement noting her concern and that she would be discussing the issue further with the brand, which might have quelled some of the worst of the subsequent criticism.

3. Look to the future and restore trust

The next part of Kardashian's statement notes that she appreciated Balenciaga's apology, that they were taking steps to ensure it wouldn't happen again, and that she would be re-evaluating her relationship with the brand.

But far from the strong condemnation audiences were looking for, many viewed this as a half-hearted response aimed at rehabilitating Balenciaga's brand and maintaining her lucrative relationship with the company.

While she did not need to slam the company on social media, she could have announced that she would be terminating their agreement, sending the strong message that she places child safety above profits.

When it comes to crisis management, audiences want to see more than words – they want to see action if brands or celebrities are to regain their trust. By showing audiences the concrete steps that you are taking, you may lose a short-term corporate deal, but gain the long-term benefits of a much stronger personal reputation.

ABOUT MADELAIN ROSCHER

Described as a Public Relations (PR) guru by her peers, Madelain Roscher is the CEO of PR Worx, a full-service marketing-communications agency, which she established in 2001. With 22 years' in-depth industry experience based on an impressive consulting and corporate career, the firm has achieved remarkable successes under her leadership.

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