



Case Study: Coca-Cola & the Offensive Bottle-cap

1. STATUS

In September of 2013 Canada was swept by a new Coca-Cola campaign aimed at promoting its vitamin-water products. The concept was simple enough – a random mix of French and English words was printed on the inside of the bottle caps. On September 17th a couple came across the unfortunate word combination of “you retard”. They later photographed the cap and uploaded it onto Facebook alongside a copy of the letter they sent to Coca-Cola regarding the incident. The post became viral with more than 800 shares in half a day.

2. ISSUE

The situation escalated so quickly because the person who found the bottle cap, Blake Loates, has a mentally disabled sister, Fiona, who suffers from cerebral palsy and autism, which severely impair her cognitive development. Fiona and Blake's father – Doug Loates – used social media to voice his outrage regarding the offensive bottle cap. His emotional Facebook status, followed by the official letter he sent to the beverage company, became viral with hundreds of shares in less than a day. As a result people flooded Coca-Cola's Facebook page with negative comments and posts.

3. ACTIONS

Coca-Cola were quick to respond to the issue, but were unable to contain the social media boom it created. The company posted a written media statement on their Facebook page, apologizing for the mistake and “the oversight in the review process”, promising to destroy all bottle caps. Coca-Cola additionally issued an official apology to the Canadian family, which the family accepted.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

Coca-Cola did well in quickly responding and providing an explanation for the offensive bottle cap. However, that wasn't enough to stop the social media flood. This is mainly due to a lack of proper crisis management. In a campaign the purpose of which is to provide customers with a random combination of words, the possible threat should have been expected and prepared for. Be it with an extensive analysis of possibly offensive word combinations or with the creation of a strategy on how to deal with a potential crisis of the sort.

Should you or your company be in a crisis situation like this BEYOO ONLINE can help by:

- a. preparing for a potential social media crisis;
- b. creating and developing a good crisis management strategy;
- c. implementing SEO techniques to push negative content to the back pages of search engines;
- d. submission and creation of press releases and articles;
- e. coaching staff members on how to properly conduct themselves online.

Contact us:

BEYOO ONLINE.

Phone number: +41 76 624 00 15

E-mail: info@beyooonline.com

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