Twitter Toppled Toyota

After Toyota’s worldwide recall of almost 10 million vehicles came to light, there was a great disturbance in the Twittersphere. Consumers’ reactions to the recall hit Toyota very hard, as the automotive giant couldn’t handle the influx of Tweets. Every minute, Toyota felt the pressure of thirty new Tweets, throwing its crisis-management strategy out the window. If nothing else, this proves one very important fact – in this social-media age, companies don’t have room to make mistakes.

For full article Murthy, Devang 2/22/10 http://www.topnews.in/twitter-toppled-toyota-2254334

Plushenko’s Delusions of Grandeur

Evgeni Plushenko, silver medalist for men’s figure skating, is trying to hold on to his dream of the gold medal. While this may be understandable, not only has he denied that Evan Lysacek, the gold medalist, is the true champion of men’s figure skating, but he has gone so far as to award himself a platinum medal. His website expresses his delusions by showcasing his fabricated platinum medal for all to see.

For full article: Hendricks, Maggie 2/22/10 http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/vancouver/blog/fourth_place_medal/post/In-Plushenko-smirk-and-web-site-he-should-not-have-oly.221408

Killer Whale Kills Trainer

At the close of the lunchtime show, the killer whale Tilikum killed Veteran trainer Dawn Brancheau. SeaWorld has halted Shamu shows at the Orlando theme park and at sister parks in San Antonio and San Diego while it examines the death.

Shamu and the killer whale is an essential and established part of the SeaWorld brand. Not only must SeaWorld reassure the public its parks are still safe, but it must work to preserve its brand image.

Unfortunately, during its first post-attack press conference, Orlando SeaWorld President Dan Brown did not immediately correct a sheriff’s department spokesman comment which stated that Brancheau accidentally fell into the water. Brown, on the other hand only said that she “drowned in an incident with one of our killer whales.” It was only two hours later that SeaWorld acknowledged Tilikum had grabbed Brancheau by her ponytail and yanked her into the water. The park then had its head animal trainer available to the media to explain and defend its methods of training its whales.

Larry L. Smith, president of the Institute for Crisis Management, in Louisville, Ky., supported SeaWorld’s response, stating “They’ve not overreacted. They’ve not gone into a stall. They’re not ducking the media,” He also added that they had the advantage that the attack occurred the same day the head of Toyota testified before Congress about his own company’s public relations crisis.

Peter Yesawich, chairman of Ypartnership, an Orlando marketing firm that specializes in travel and entertainment, said SeaWorld enjoys a reputation as a family-friendly and animal-friendly company, which should help it recover from the crisis.

Yesawich said SeaWorld also showed responsibility by shutting down its killer whale shows until it can assess what happened. “It’s one of these tragic, unpredictable
Kevin Smith vs. Southwest Airlines

On a recent flight, Kevin Smith, director of motion picture hits Clerks and Chasing Amy, was asked by the crew of Southwest Airlines to leave the plane. The reason? He was deemed too overweight.

Smith reacted by broadcasting his feelings via Twitter: "Dear @SouthwestAir - I know I'm fat, but was Captain Leysath really justified in throwing me off a flight for which I was already seated?" and later "The @SouthwestAir Diet. How it works: you're publicly shamed into a slimmer figure. Crying the weight right off has never been easier!"

Southwest responded by posting a blog entry apologizing to Smith and admitting that the situation was poorly handled.

"Mr. Smith originally purchased two Southwest seats on a flight from Oakland to Burbank—as he's been known to do when traveling on Southwest. He decided to change his plans and board an earlier flight to Burbank, which technically means flying standby...We had only a single seat available for him to occupy. Our pilots are responsible for the safety and comfort of all customers on the aircraft and therefore made the determination that Mr. Smith needed more than one seat. Our employees explained why the decision was made, accommodated Mr. Smith on a later flight, and issued him a $100 Southwest travel voucher for his inconvenience."

Smith—who says he was seated with his seat belt buckled and both armrests down—wrote a rebuttal on his well-trafficked blog. And he will continue to express his frustration. For his upcoming appearance on The Daily Show, he has challenged Southwest to come along and bring an airline seat for him to sit in and prove his point.

This is a prime example of how Twitter and social media are changing public relations and how two different divisions of a company (PR and Customer Service) are increasingly intersecting. With Twitter, many companies are practicing customer relations in the public space (Customer Service), while also using the platform to respond to dissatisfied customers and maintain brand image (PR). It has become crucial for the two to communicate efficiently and effectively.

With over 1.5 million Twitter followers, it was unavoidable that the incident would gain exposure. Eventually, the story was picked up by Gossip powerhouse TMZ.

"Look how fat I am on your plane! Quick! Throw me off!"-twitter/@thatkevinsmith

"I'm tired of getting bad reports from our employees. In the future, make them go through Public Relations."

For full article: McCarthy, Caroline 2/16/10