Critics inundate Twitter with #AskSeaWorld campaign

By Sandra Pedicini

"Have questions about killer whale care? Tweet us!" SeaWorld called out to the Twitterverse last week.

The company may have gotten a little more than it bargained for.

Critics have flooded Twitter with the hashtag #AskSeaWorld on Friday and throughout the weekend. Comments continued throughout the morning and early afternoon Monday.

"Can you explain why 62 orcas have died?"

"Why don't u follow Ringling Bros & #EmptyTheTanks? It's the only thing that'll save you.now"

And from PETA: "If you were in a bathtub for 30 years, don't you think you'd get a little psychotic?"

A SeaWorld spokesman couldn't immediately be reached for comment. But SeaWorld said on its blog "it's no surprise that animal rights activists, led most notably by PETA, have inundated Twitter to try to deny people with real questions a chance to have their questions answered." The company said 70 percent of questions came from PETA "and other animal rights groups or bots."

SeaWorld responded on Twitter to all the comments last week.

"Jacking hashtags is so 2014.#bewareoftrolls"

It said in another Tweet: "No time for bots and bullies. We want to answer your questions. #askseaworld #notrollzone"

It's not the first time a company's attempts at a social media campaign have attracted critics. In 2012, for example, McDonald's tried a #McDStories campaign. The hashtag was quickly hijacked by people who complained about the chain, and animal welfare groups used it to tell stories of animal byproducts in the menu.

"I think for a company that is under fire, as I would say SeaWorld is right now, that's not a smart move," said Denise Lee Yohn, author of "What Great Brands Do." "You're inviting people to take over the conversation, where you really need to shape and influence the narrative as much as possible."

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