

What Happens If Your Organization's Name Is Suddenly Associated with Something Negative?

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When the “Coronavirus” burst on the scene, the marketing team at [Corona Beer](#) were worried. What would the negative publicity do to undermine their brand? More recently, the “Delta” variant has emerged creating the same uncertainty with companies like [Delta Airlines](#), [Delta Faucets](#), and others with the same name.

Which begs the question: What can and should you do if the name of your church, nonprofit, or business is suddenly co-opted by something negative in the culture? So far, Delta has had fun with it as you can see by the Tweet below from Delta’s chief health officer. For a company that was actually named for the Mississippi Delta region, where the carrier got its start as a crop duster, it doesn’t seem to be worried (but that’s their public position and we can’t know what they’re thinking about privately).



Henry Ting, MD MBA
@henrytingmd

...

Replying to @sarahclazarus

We prefer to call it the B.1.617.2 variant since that is so much more simple to say and remember...

6:50 PM · Jun 29, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet 17 Likes



In other cases, it could be a disaster. That's why I asked a group of marketing experts what they would recommend. Their advice is worth keeping somewhere just in case something similar happens to your organization:

What's important to consider is how long the crisis probably will last. For example, thanks to the evolving nature of viruses, the so-called Delta Variant will most assuredly be replaced by an Epsilon or Zeta Variant at some point in the near future. So if the head pastor at Delta Methodist Church was asking my advice, I'd say be patient and wait it out. But if you're the head pastor at Bill Cosby Presbyterian Church, well, probably a name change is in order. – **Jonathan Bock – President, Grace Hill Media**

With the Corona Beer incident, although a poll found some hesitation among the public to buy Corona when the pandemic first started, executives at Corona's parent company Constellation Brands concluded that consumers understood there was no linkage between their products and the virus, so they decided not to address the issue — and it turns out that was the right call. Sales of Corona beer were not affected and Constellation shares are actually up.

If customers are likely to get your brand name confused with a crisis, public issue, or negative trend, then you should proactively address the potential confusion. Clearly state what your brand stands for and the scope of your business and reassure customers that no connection exists. But don't draw more attention than necessary to the potential confusion — and you might need to pause other public communications for a while until the "buzz" wanes. But continue other brand-building efforts and return to communicating clear on-brand messages as soon as possible.

Situations like this make it clear how important it is to cultivate a strongly forged brand identity in the first place — that way, when a threat to your brand name arises, you have a solid foundation to fall back on. — **Denise Lee Yohn – keynote speaker, brand leadership expert, and Director of the Faith & Work Journey**.

When you find your organization's name suddenly associated with some unrelated negative press, the first thing to do is to stay calm and take a breath. At that moment, assess the nature of the issue and determine its potential impact on your brand. In some cases, the

negativity is so distant that the issue can be easily dismissed or even ignored. However, most of the time, it is not that easy. At times like this, it is always best to affirm the unwavering qualities of your organization's brand. The integrity of your brand will stand in stark contrast to any negativity that may be inadvertently linked to your organization. People often lack thoughtfulness about these matters and benefit from a simple clarification to recognize and disassociate one from the other. – **Mark Dreistadt, President-CEO, Infinity Concepts**

You should tackle the brand confusion problem through all your marketing tactics, by stepping up your efforts. Out of the big 3 tactics: PR, Social Marketing, and Advertising, Advertising through your normal channels is likely to be the fastest and easiest way to take control of the situation. The catch is that it probably requires an increase in your ad spend budget. Don't hesitate to ask for a favor with your major advertising partners after you explain the situation to them. Social Influencers would be another relatively fast and efficient way to recapture ground with the added value of their third-party endorsement. I would use these tactics not to address the brand confusion, but to further establish your normal brand messaging. Stick to your story and expand your efforts rather than being distracted and pulled into the brand confusion story. There may ALSO be an opportunity via PR and Social to engage directly in the brand confusion story by speaking to your solutions or how you are helping to solve or resolve the problem. For example, how Delta Airlines is handling the Delta Variant is certainly relevant, though I would not make that the main focus of my efforts. The one thing you probably shouldn't do is to make light of or make fun of the brand confusion created by the negative thing that is stealing your brand attention unless your brand is foundationally irreverent anyway. – **Scott A. Shuford, Chief Engagement Officer, FrontGate Media**