



ROWAN MORRIS - BUSINESS ANALYST 25 OCT 2017

A few weeks ago I was outraged by Dove’s latest race controversy advert. This morning I washed my hands with Dove soap and used Dove antiperspirant. Putting my own moral hypocrisy aside, it led me to thinking about marketing controversies in general. Do big brands really suffer when they are hit with a scandal?

In case you haven’t seen it, the [latest Facebook offering](#) from Dove appears to show a black woman “turning” white after using one of their soap products. This is not the first time Dove have been accused of racism. In 2011 one of their campaigns used imagery suggesting a black model was the “before” picture and a white model as the “after”. There was also the suggestion on [bottles in 2014](#) that their lotion was suitable for “normal to dark” skin. For a company that has been praised for its promotion of real beauty, this repeated behaviour seems incredibly backward.

Have Dove product sales suffered? Apparently not. According to [Adbrands](#), Dove remains the leading bar and liquid soap brand in the US, and the clear market leader in body wash with around 24% share. [Unilever](#) also claim that Dove has the top-selling cleansing bar in the UK.

What about when controversies hit small brands? Although the scandals may not ‘trend’ due to lower awareness, advice on how to deal with it remains pretty much the same. According to [Hannah Butcher](#), senior social media specialist at White.net, there are two key approaches: create an initial response to the crisis, and find opportunities for positive coverage. Alternatively, if the brand is accidentally embroiled in a wider issue, they should stay out of the media entirely. This is of course not possible for global brands, and is therefore advantageous for smaller ones. The main principle for when PR crises hit small brands is the same as for bigger: “[they] must be dealt with quickly and robustly to be contained.” (Alison Coleman, [The Guardian](#)).

The crux therefore appears to be a brand’s use of social media. This is of course a double-edged sword, as controversies such as [Walker’s twitter campaign](#) and this latest Dove blunder actually originated on social media platforms. Some examples provided by [Econsultancy](#) (ranging from BA to Taco Bell) demonstrate that even apologising via social media can cause a deeper problem. Essentially, when you get it wrong on social media, you can get it very very wrong.

Although it will be difficult to dent the profits of such a well-known brand in the short-term, the implication of Dove’s repeated offences could have severe consequences long-term. Dove did what any brand would do and [apologised](#), but it seems this may be one misstep too far. An apology is not enough for many consumers (including some [famous faces](#)) and patience is growing thin. I for one will be rethinking my choice in soap and deodorant.

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