

Tim McIntyre's response to Domino's

Here's a more official indication of "lessons learned": I reached out to Tim McIntyre, Vice President of Communications at Domino's with a few follow-up questions. As the saying goes, there are 3 sides to every story: yours, mine and truth. In pursuit of the third, it made sense to go straight to the source:

Question 1:

Is the store that this happened to, still in business? The store is still open for business. Remember – Domino's did not do this, it was something that was done TO us. Customers have returned to that store, because they know that what happened was a hoax; that no food ever made it to customers; and that we dealt with the individuals swiftly and severely. (Note that this video was filmed on Easter Sunday in a small town in the south. The phones weren't ringing; there was little, if any business, happening at that time. The people who did this were bored because they had nothing else to do.) The franchise owner is being removed from the system. He has been asked to seek a buyer for this business. We believe that his action (or lack of action, in not terminating the instigator of this incident before this all happened, even though there were plenty of reasons to do so) created an environment for something like this to happen.

Question 2:

What do you think was new/innovative/effective in Domino's response to the backlash/criticism/rumor/speculation? Interestingly, Domino's has been credited for doing something that was virtually unprecedented – having the president of the company create a video in less than 48 hours and posting it on YouTube to address in no uncertain terms that we're taking this hoax very seriously. We used the same medium the video posters did. And yet...we get criticized for not doing it "fast enough." How can you do something that had never been done before, but not do it fast enough? That criticism amazes me. Here's the scoop: we learned about the video less than 45 minutes after it was posted. We published the individuals' photos via our internal communication media to every store in the U.S. (5,000 of them) within an hour and got a bead on them by the end of the evening (thanks to our internal team and some web savvy customers who have been rewarded by us). By morning, we had confirmed their identities, worked with the franchisee to get them fired, worked with the local police and the health department, and communicated all of this to the web sites and blogs where this thing was getting traction. By the end of Tuesday, there were still only 250,000 hits on the video and yet we consciously drew attention to it by posting a link to our company's response on Twitter; when we posted our YouTube response on Wednesday, it was up to 1 million hits. A big number, yes, but less so in the context that there are 307 million people in the U.S. Far more had not seen it than had. Even now, there are far less people who even know that this happened than there are those who do. The online "buzz" about the video lasted about three days; in the mainstream media (which was slow to even notice), it lasted about a week. (Note about the video of the president: he was in Florida on Monday and Tuesday, due to the holiday; he was in our Ann Arbor offices just a few hours before he sat down in front of a camera on Wednesday.)

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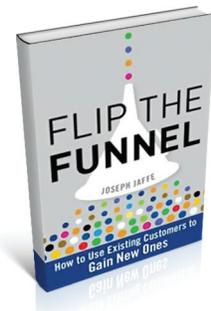
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Question 3:

What have you learned from this whole incident? (Lessons Learned) The first lesson in any situation is to not panic. There are plenty of ugly things out there on the Internet and only the rare few that bring harm to a brand's reputation. You've got to be able to respond in a way that is appropriate to the situation. I liken it to not putting out a candle with a fire hose. In the end, once we began to respond more aggressively, the entire story changed. It went from "there are people tainting food at Domino's" to "how is Domino's handling a hoax video posted on YouTube by two employees?" to "how can companies protect themselves from the likes of YouTube?". We are aggressive in our monitoring and aggressive in our actions. I won't say how many videos of people doing stupid things have been posted that we've addressed well before anyone else noticed. We really go after the ones that could cause real harm to our reputation. Most people who see the errant actions of individuals (like the guy taking a bath in a Burger King sink, for example) write them off as fools, and not as being representative of a brand. Our brand is nearly 50 years old and we have 8,700 stores in 60 countries around the world. We deliver a million orders a day. We're a lot stronger than two idiots in North Carolina with a video camera and a dumb idea. (I've also been criticized for using the word "idiots." If these two were teenagers, I would have been more gentle and used the word "teenagers." As they are both in their 30s, I stand by my use of the word.) Our Social Media Team is active in its response to comments and questions on media such as Twitter and Facebook and we openly respond (as Domino's; we don't pose as other people) on blogs when we feel there is an apology to be made or an error in fact to correct.

Question 4:

What steps have you taken to avoid this from ever happening again? Communication is key. Thanks to this incident, one of the messages we've been sending to our stores for years has finally been proven true: every hire counts. (This is actually a message in the Wiley book I co-authored, called Hire The American Dream.) We reinforced that hiring and training are crucial; that our customers rely on us and that our most precious commodity is our customers' trust. We continue to inspect our stores; work with our owners to monitor what happens in those stores and we respond to every consumer issue. We always have. We've built a culture and a brand built on service, integrity, trust and product quality. It took a hit, but our reputation rebounded quickly....as noted by Domino's Pizza being named #1 of all major consumer restaurant brands on the recent American Customer Satisfaction Index. Will we ever prevent someone from doing something stupid in our stores? Of course not, and anyone who says so is deluding themselves. When you work with people (and we employ 175,000 of them worldwide), something is bound to happen. But again, context is key: more people don't know about this than there are those who do....and the fact that this thing made such a splash is indicative of how unusual it was. We deliver 350 million orders a year...a lot of people judge us based on their personal experiences with our brand, not on a video posted on YouTube. Again – the majority of people who have contacted us realize that this was not something Domino's did, but something that was done to us. You build your reputation day by day, order by order. Once you have that strong foundation of trust, it will take a lot more than a video to bring you down.

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