

Features

SocialPro: How to Recover from a Social Media Faux Pas

By Matt Alderton | Published: Monday, April 29, 2013



When you make mistakes on social networks, you make them in front of the entire world. Here are some tips for bouncing back.

Unless your career is centered on shock-jock sensationalism, you may find there is little to gain in offending or polarizing your social networks — and much to lose, including professional credibility and potential future opportunities. Still we are only human, and crossing the “netiquette” line does not have to be a point of no return.

In 2012, a KitchenAid employee posted a disrespectful tweet about the president’s family from the iconic cookware brand’s official Twitter account during the first of three presidential debates. Retribution was swift in the form of complaints and criticism from KitchenAid’s community of more than 25,000 Twitter followers. To her credit, KitchenAid’s brand manager quickly followed up with an apology for the offensive tweet: “Deepest apologies for an irresponsible tweet that is in no way a representation of the brand’s opinion,” the company said in a follow-up tweet, after which it posted the following message on its Facebook page: “Hello, everyone. My name is Cynthia Soledad, and I am the head of the KitchenAid brand. I would like to personally apologize to President Barack Obama, his family and everyone on Twitter for the offensive tweet sent earlier. It was carelessly sent in error by a member of our Twitter team who, needless to say, won’t be tweeting for us anymore. That said, I take full responsibility for my team. Thank you for hearing me out.”

The episode illustrates perfectly what you shouldn’t do (offend your audience) and what you should do: Act swiftly and sincerely to correct mistakes when you make them.

“When you put something offensive out there on social media, you can’t take it back,” says Amber Pankonin, MS, RD, CSP, LMNT, of Lincoln, Neb., an active social media user and founder of StirList, a website that allows users to search for, create and share recipe “playlists.” “But you can admit to it, apologize and respond.”

Common Social Media Missteps

There are as many ways to abuse social media as there are to use it. Along with political rants, social media faux pas include:

- Spreading incorrect or outdated information
- Using offensive language
- Making defamatory statements about individuals or organizations
- Being argumentative
- Badmouthing a client or employer
- Complaining excessively
- Failing to cite information sources
- Using incorrect spelling, punctuation or grammar
- Bragging excessively
- Selling or promoting instead of informing and engaging
- Ignoring comments from friends and followers, and
- Being perpetually negative.

The 5 A’s of Atonement

1. **Admit.** When you make a social media misstep, admit it, advises Sue Reninger, managing partner at RMD Advertising, a Columbus, Ohio-based firm that specializes in social media strategy for food industry clients. “If you [make a mistake and] say nothing, people are going to draw the conclusion that you’re hiding, that you’re uneducated or that you simply don’t care, all three of which can be damaging to your personal brand.” The sooner you admit the error, the better. “In the social space, [people] expect an immediate response,” Reninger adds.
2. **Acknowledge.** It’s important to acknowledge that mistakes can impact others and to empathize with those who may have been affected. For example, KitchenAid’s brand manager directed her apology not only to the general public, but specifically to the Obama family.
3. **Apologize.** “I’m sorry,” goes a long way, according to Reninger. “If you’ve made a mistake, apologize for misspeaking and apologize for how it must have offended someone. Be short, be very human and be very direct.” Adele Cerhs, president of Epic PR Group, an Alexandria, Va.-based public relations firm that specializes in crisis communications, recommends no-caveat apologies: *I’m sorry* not *I’m sorry, but ...* “You’re simply acknowledging them by saying, ‘I’m sorry you had a negative experience. I’d love to discuss this with you offline,’” says Cerhs. “You’re closing the loop on a customer service issue, and you have to do it publicly.”
4. **Act.** Correcting mistakes is just as important as apologizing for them. “If you make a mistake, that mistake is living and breathing on social networks for a really long time — especially if you don’t address it correctly” says Cerhs. Corrective action could range from eliminating an offensive post to promising to double-check science before making recommendations.
5. **Accept and move on.** The final and most important step, according to Pankonin, is moving on. “You have to forgive yourself,” she says. “Start producing valuable content again in order to rebuild trust. We’ve seen it plenty of times with celebrities: They goof up, they apologize, people forgive them and we all move on.”

Tweet +1 Pin it Email

Rate This Story ★★★★★

Add New Comment

0 comments

Leave a message...

Best ▾ Community

Share

No one has commented yet.

Comment feed

Subscribe via email

DISQUS

► SPOTLIGHT ON....

Sunflower Seeds: These Kernels Pack a Big Nutritional Punch

» MORE

► WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Want to sound off on this article or another you’ve read on this site? [Click here](#) to get in touch with Food and Nutrition’s editors.

► MEET OUR HEROES

Dianne Lollar



"I truly believe we can all make the world a better place to live."

» MORE

► VIEW THE CURRENT ISSUE

The Spirit Issue

- Mindful eating
- Ayurveda
- Native American food tradition
- Cheesecloth
- 9 recipes you'll want to try



Always the latest news and resources from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics — the world’s largest organization of food and nutrition professionals.