

PRized PR C(o)up

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Starbucks Couldn't Buy Better PR Than the Red Cups Coverage. Here's What We Can Learn From It.

On Nov. 1, **Starbucks** unveiled its now famous red cups for the holiday season. But not everyone was thrilled with the new **design**. **Joshua Feuerstein**, a self-described “American evangelist, Internet and **social** media personality,” [ranted against the cups](#) and “the age of political correctness” in a video gone viral. **Donald Trump** [called for a boycott](#). Faith groups railed against the “War on Christmas.”

According to a survey by [Worldcom Public Relations Group](#), [93 percent of member agencies](#) did not think the red cup controversy would hurt the **Starbucks brand**. There are a few lessons that entrepreneurs can learn and apply to their own **brand**.

1. **Be bold and patient.**

When an obese man climbs to the top of a diving board, what happens? Everyone at the pool becomes a spectator. Whether the man completes a perfect front four and a half -- the toughest dive in the world -- or finishes with a belly flop, he has commanded our attention. And organizations that can command that kind of attention will be rewarded.

According to **Google**, there is close to 10 million news stories that have been done on the red cup. The aftermath of this impacts almost everyone -- from celebrities to politicians to knitting circles at local churches. For **Starbucks**, they couldn't buy better coverage.

In the days that followed, **Starbucks** could have recanted due to public pressure, but the company chose to be patient and ride out the **social** media firestorm.

“My recommendation to **Starbucks** is to sit back, relax and enjoy all the media coverage,” said Matt Hamrin, senior counselor at [Morgan & Myers](#) in Waukesha, WI.

2. **Stay true to your core values.**

A lot of angry customers believed that **Starbucks** belied its core values by removing Christ and

Christmas from its cups. However, a statement from **Starbucks** suggested that “this year's **design** is another way **Starbucks** is inviting customers to create their own stories with a red cup that mimics a blank canvas” -- a message that adheres to **Starbucks’ brand**.

“What **Starbucks** has said ties back to the company's core value system, which encourages inclusiveness, diversity and kindness, which, frankly, are what the holidays are all about,” said **Reed Handley**, account director at [Bliss Integrated Communication](#) in New York.

Had this been inconsistent with **Starbucks brand** messaging of a company that strives for inclusiveness and diversity, the company would have faced much stiffer opposition.

“Just six months ago, we were talking about the Race Together campaign, and while this effort fell somewhat flat, it was indicative of **Starbucks** efforts to get people talking,” said **Chris Thomas**, president of [Intrepid](#) in Salt Lake City.

Consumers are savvy, and if they feel like they are being purposefully misdirected for **marketing** and public relations gains, the negative feedback can overwhelm a company.

3. Understand your consumer base, and build brand loyalty.

While those on **social** media might suggest that **Starbucks** didn't understand its consumer base, I think the opposite is true. The company knew its customer base well enough to try something bold.

“What people need to remember is that **Starbucks** is serving coffee to people around the globe and serving many different audiences and many different religious needs,” said **Sean Rossall**, vice president at [Cerrell Associates](#) in Los Angeles.

Entrepreneurs must have a solid understanding of your core customer base. **Starbucks** is a **brand** that has built up quite a bit of **brand** loyalty with customers. In addition to being hooked on pumpkin spice lattes, we've come to know and respect **Starbucks** corporate values. The more entrepreneurs can understand their consumers and further develop **brand** loyalty, the more opportunities the company will have to try bold things.

Image credit: [Starbucks](#)

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