

The Risks and Rewards of Ameliorating: When Brands Should Step In to Make a Bad Situation Better

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Author: Samantha Sekora



Sometimes, sh*t hits the fan.

In our never-ending quest to disrupt the status quo, stay relevant, support global causes, promote advocacy, or something in between, we take risks. And today—with [one third of the most successful marketing campaigns](#) including nods or references to pop culture—it seems as if brands will do *whatever* it takes to outdo and outwit their competition.

As of late, brands and creators alike continue to capitalize on hot-button, buzz-generating topics, no matter the sentiment that surrounds them. By exercising the art of *ameliorating* (or stepping in with the intent of helping make a bad situation better), they have a chance to put in their two cents and make their voice heard for a (*seemingly*) good cause. Yet, without knowing what may await *ameliorators* down the line, could their risks truly outweigh the reward?

The Risks vs. The Rewards: What’s Really Worth It?

Depending on your brand, and your approach, it could be worthwhile to jump in and stir the pot.

Truth be told, there is no reward without risk, but by opting to be more conservative in speech and opinions, brands who succeed in *ameliorating* work to not ruffle any feathers, and just in case, implement plans in the event of a boomerang of backlash.

On the other hand, when often detached, members of a company’s top team take it upon themselves to launch campaigns centered around *ameliorating*—without conferring with other important parties—things can go awry. And while their intentions may be good, we’ve all known a brand or two who has suffered a parachute-less freefall and spent years scrambling to put the pieces back together and recover.

So, what’s really worth it? Let’s revisit some of our favorite success stories, as well as some, well, not-so-successful ones.

Successes We Applaud

Light risk, heavy reward: These brands truly succeeded in making the best of a bad situation.

Uber Eats is ‘Good as Gold’

After several successful ads and killer [2023 Superbowl spots](#), Uber Eats put a unique spin on nostalgia while tapping into one of the most talked about topics of the year: [Bravo TV’s Scandavol](#).

By revamping the 10-year-old one-hit-wonder, ‘Good as Gold’ by [Scheana Shay](#), Uber Eats was able to produce a heartwarming ad featuring a trio of *Vanderpump Rules*’ stars backed by a girl power anthem that proved that all you need in life is friends...and food!

Putting a present-day spin on their recent nostalgia-focused campaign (and standing strong as members of #TeamAriana), Uber Eats not only succeeded in capturing our attention, but used the wholesome message they created to [exercise a little philanthropy](#) as well.

The Foundation to Combat Antisemitism Stands Up to Jewish Hate

Did you know that while Jewish Americans only make up 2.4% of the population, they are on the receiving end of [more than 55% of all hate crimes](#) each year?

While others idled when it came time to take action against Jewish hate, the founder of the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism and owner of the New England Patriots, Robert Kraft, knew it was time to ‘[stand up to Jewish hate](#).’ In launching their campaign, the foundation did what others didn’t—take action. Taking that stance against hate, their impactful and thought-provoking ads were able to reach millions on social media, OTT, and more.

MAX Maxes Out on Mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes—but for this intern at the streaming service formerly known as HBO Max, their mistake was met with a [shocking reaction](#).

After accidentally launching a completely blank test email that reached *all* the company’s subscribers, a panicked intern helped Max set an example to brands everywhere. Instead of disciplining or terminating the intern for their unfortunate mistake, Max acknowledged it with a message of support. And *that* was relatable. So much so that thousands of current and former interns began the trend ‘*Dear Intern*’ by sharing their own work horror stories, offering beneficial advice, and giving Max a humanistic, authentic spin.

Good Intentions Don’t Always Result in ‘Good’ Rewards

Unlike the successful *ameliorating* executed by the above brands, there are oftentimes [a few campaigns](#) that began with great intentions but, once hitting the masses, cause a brand and their narrative to be flipped on its head.

After failing to achieve their goal of communicating allyship and instead focusing heavily on product sales, Pepsi and Kendall Jenner were unable to maintain their original message. Pepsi *may* have enjoyed seeing a 21,000% increase in brand mentions as a result of their new ad, but the sentiment was overwhelmingly negative due to their tone-deaf execution at [retelling current events](#) and lack-luster apologies.

Similarly, Bud Light’s message of support and empowerment featuring noted trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney was not received as planned. In fact, since March 2023, the beer’s parent company has lost \$27 million dollars in stock despite their efforts to [celebrate trans accomplishments](#) and promote allyship on TikTok. To make matters worse, when things went awry, Bud Light completely abandoned their supportive stance and sat by idly as customers spewed hate in Dylan’s direction.

What About Those Blurred Lines?

Good intentions. Big risks. Unbalanced rewards. For Nike’s ‘Dream Crazy’ campaign, the jury is still out on whether it truly achieved its goals or created life-long enemies.

Partnering with quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who at the time was subject to heavy press—both negative and positive—Nike set out to support the infamous athlete by encouraging us all to “*believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.*” Despite their efforts to publicly applaud Colin’s bravery and commitment, fans didn’t take the support lightly and the brand was subject to years of backlash from fellow athletes, celebrities, and even presidents.

Unlike other flops, this campaign achieved results that blurred the lines on whether brands should *ameliorate*. Not only did this campaign increase Nike’s stock by 5% post-release, the sportswear giant’s change-making message even won an [Emmy](#). Begging the question: Are the risks *really* worth it?

Understanding the Art of Ameliorating

Clearly, there’s truly no way to know the risks or rewards of a campaign...but that doesn’t mean brands shouldn’t try their hand at *ameliorating*! All brands need is the [right agency partner to help them ace it](#). Here are a few key points to keep in mind.

Joining the Game vs. Watching from the Sidelines

It’s no secret that some brands have truly benefitted from risky campaigns that sought to highlight strong POVs regarding the LGBTQIA+ community, #BlackLivesMatter movement, women’s rights, and more.

But what makes these risks more successful? By partnering with relevant causes and initiatives, these brands were able to set themselves apart and reap rewards:

- [Durex and \(RED\)](#) gives a f* about AIDS
- [AprilAire and the American Lung Association](#) fight for Healthy Air and better lung health
- [Ben and Jerry’s](#) call out ‘half-baked’ justice

TLDR: Do it for the cause, not your brand image. Blind activism is *not* the move! When brands risk it all and bet on themselves rather than capitalizing on trending topics or causes, they reveal their instability. And their lack of change-making results can send them down a precarious path filled with frequent backlash and derailments.

When to Create and Use Your Exit Strategy

Though they plan for the best, brands often forget to perceive the worst. In order to create something successful, all parties involved need to outline all risks, challenges, rewards, and the like. It’s imperative to acknowledge potential downfalls and generate several backup plans.

TLDR: Locate all emergency exits beforehand. Aligning with legal teams and other prominent internal voices is necessary to ensure your brand has a life-saving parachute to protect them from future issues. Our advice? Be smart with your partners. Don’t appear wishy-washy. And most importantly, support the course internally, not just externally.

How to Avoid a Big Splash

Get your feet wet by testing the waters. Skip the full-fledged campaign and [initiate quiet conversations](#) within your desired community. Brands don’t always have to put their POVs on blast—they can voice their opinions with like-minded consumers and those who matter most.

With an air-tight monitoring and response plan, brands can enter crowded pool clubs without drawing too much attention to themselves. Here, they can connect with their desired audience in the comments. This laid-back approach is key when fostering personal storytelling and showcasing authenticity.

TLDR: Say your peace where it matters. It’s clear: Silence is *not* all that golden. On the flip side, consumers don’t actually expect brands to always have a say. So, find that happy medium and say what matters to those who matter to you.

Let’s Learn, Earn, and Grow Together

We’ll say it louder for the people in the back: To succeed in *ameliorating*, brands need the right agency partner to help them ace their efforts.

Are you ready to *ameliorate*? We here at AGAIN know just what you need. Drop us a line at info@againinteractive.com to start learning, earning, and growing!

SAMANTHA SEKORA

Samantha Sekora—a member of the creative team here at AGAIN—is a cutting-edge writer and lover of all things social. When she’s not typing away, you might find Samantha off doing some of her favorite things, like roller skating and antiquing. All while sporting her signature sunflower pin.

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