

The big new risk for business... being KFC'd on social media

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Getting a 'roasting' from the eye-witness consumer is a growing risk for business now that social media can broadcast even the appearance of questionable behaviour. To be more specific, a brand can be 'KFC'd'.

The danger was recently highlighted by the case of the hosed-down chicken at Braamfontein KFC where employees scattered chicken pieces on the ground and hosed them down.

A KFC statement said later the workers were trying to hide from management the fact that they had mistakenly coated chicken that was to be discarded. The raw chicken was not meant for customers. The hosing was to remove the coating.

Reputational damage already done

The scene was filmed by someone in nearby flats. Footage was then posted on social media, provoking scathing comments from countless consumers. You can issue denials. You can post your version of events on your website. You can release a press statement. It doesn't matter. By the time you react, considerable reputational damage will have been done.

The KFC statement assured consumers the brand follows strict food disposal processes, adding that KFC had dealt firmly with the store owner and those involved.

Will this do any good?

I doubt it. The public will remember KFC, a dirty floor and chicken pieces scattered on it. You can't eradicate powerful images with a corporate statement.

Playing catch-up

A PR gesture might help. You might reward whistle-blowers with a month's free supply of KFC chicken and post footage of them enjoying a chicken dinner while stating that the brand is fully committed to world-class standards.

A campaign to rebuild trust by the local franchise might also help. The main lesson is that once a gaffe is captured on social media you are playing catch-up.

Some months earlier, Cell C faced a local roasting when a customer placed a massive banner next to a highway

complaining about "useless" service. Cell C took legal action, only for the judge to rule that criticism containing fair comment is protected.

The issue received huge play on social media. International social media experience is also illuminating - for confirmation look no further than footage of US police using deadly force to apprehend a motorist with a broken tail-light.

The incident was captured on film by another eye-witness consumer. Exposure such as this can only increase. Body cameras or 'body cams' are already used by US, UK and Australian police. Similar mini-cameras are being bought by the public.

The world is watching...

Surveillance cameras at private homes are another source of damning footage. In a recent US case, the film showed examples of mail abuse by an employee of a postal delivery service.

The message for business is simple. You don't work in retailing or services. You work in a goldfish bowl and the whole world is watching. So step up staff training, make sure workers realise their behaviour is under scrutiny and consistently improve service levels.

When mistakes occur, don't take your customers to court and don't look for excuses. Be open. Give a full explanation. Demonstrate that lessons have been learned. Institute remedial action.

If you don't, you can expect to be KFC'd.

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