

The Moose in the Room: A Mercedes-Benz Case

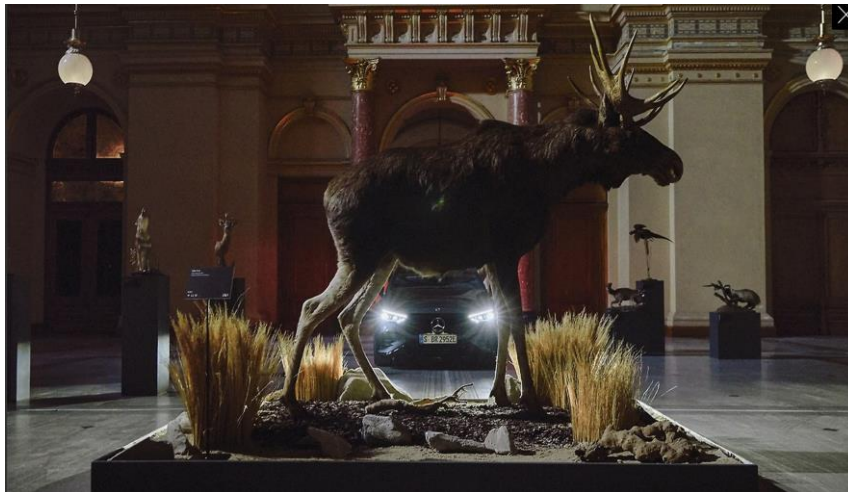
MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

10 years after the incident

In a bold attempt to use previous mistakes as a way to incorporate humour in their advertising strategy, moose soft toys were given away from Mercedes-Benz dealerships. In addition to further embracing the legacy of the 'moose test', the dealership at Mercedes-Benz played the song by Chumbawamba's 'Tubthumping' at motor shows that highlighted the lyrics "I get knocked down/but I get up again" (Davis, 2016).

25 years after the incident



On the 24th of November 2022, Mercedes-Benz devoted its social media accounts to the discussion of vehicle safety. The choice to implement this campaign stood behind its two anniversaries. In 1997, 25 years ago Mercedes-Benz failed the 'Moose test' which led to the rapid introduction of the Electronic Stability Program, ESP, in the compact class as a standard procedure. The second anniversary marked 20 years since the invention of the PRE-SAFE which links active and passive safety elements to avoid a car accident. The week-long campaign included the publishing of more than 50 assets with the hashtag #allforsafety through the headquarters accounts on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The additional accounts that were dedicated to the campaign included the account of the Chairman of the Board of Management Ola Källenius, as well as the accounts of the boards of directors from research and development, marketing, and sales.

The campaign consisted of various content such as interactive quizzes and expert-led videos and animation. This includes a one-minute promotional commercial The Art of Safety: Here's to Over 25 Years of ESP. The ad includes elements of humour by focusing on the car that is effectively manoeuvring around valuable historical artefacts

in a museum. The sculptures are all shown to be doing mundane tasks such as walking the dog and looking through a smartphone. Subsequently, Mercedes-Benz wants to highlight that it protects the greatest artwork out there which is life. However, the ad's main focus is drawn to the moose that is manoeuvred around several times by the car, making it an obvious reference to the 'Moose test' 25 years ago. The ad also ends with a close-up shot of the moose.

After the end of the campaign week, Mercedes-Benz continued to post more than 40 assets on the topic of vehicle safety until the end of 2022.

The incorporation of humour in advertising campaigns

Mercedes-Benz has been actively incorporating a humoristic factor in its advertising strategies. The Mercedes-Benz 'Chicken' Magic Body Control TV commercial is an example from 2014 that gathered 25,593,778 views on Youtube. The commercial displayed multiple chickens being swimmingly moved to the sound of Diana Roos' catchy 'Upside Down'. The meaning behind the commercial was to draw a representation of how the Mercedes-Benz function Intelligent Drive is as swift as the ease with which the chickens are dancing to the beat of the music.

Negative humour

Even though Mercedes-Benz is boldly incorporating humour in its advertising strategy, an instance where black humour was used is an example of when Mercedes-Benz did not want to be associated with it. In 2013, a group of film students created a short humoristic advert using the Mercedes-Benz car. The shocking moment in the video was when the Mercedes-Benz C-Class hit a carefree boy in the countryside crossing the street and a picture of Adolf Hitler is displayed for a second. The boy's mother screams in shock the son's name - Adolf. In the text description, the following rhetoric is observed: "The Collision-Prevent-Assist-System of Mercedes-Benz works well. What if it would have been developed ages ago? What if it would be a lot better than we expected? What would be if it had a soul?". The main takeaway from this advert is that the C-Class "Detects dangers before they come up" (Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg, 2013). Despite the popularity of the advert (more than 1.2 million views on YouTube), the filmmakers make it clear in many instances during the ad that this work is in no way affiliated with the Mercedes-Benz Group. At the time of the release of the advert, Mercedes-Benz Group (Daimler AG in 2013) released the following statement in disapproval of the advert "We believe it is entirely inappropriate to use the death of a person/child or contents related to National Socialism in an advertising spot, even though it is a fictitious spot" (Zalstein, 2013).

References

Davis, T. (2016). Milestones: Mercedes-Benz's A-Class Mistake, *Drive*, Available online: <https://www.drive.com.au/news/milestones-mercedesbenzs-a-class-mistake-20140403-3620e/> [Accessed 21 February 2023]

Zalstein, D. (2021). Mercedes-Benz Hitler Ad "Entirely Inappropriate": Daimler, *Drive*, Available online: <https://www.drive.com.au/news/mercedes-benz-hitler-ad-entirely-inappropriate-daimler/> [Accessed 21 February 2023]