

Publicity stunts for marketing

 By [James White](#)

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There's an old saying that suggests there's no such thing as bad publicity for companies. While there's a grain of truth in the adage, it's always preferable to get good publicity.

Beyond media releases and other traditional methods of public relations, businesses that want to make a name for their products and services may consider engaging in publicity stunts. These are usually against-the-grain, clever ways to garner a second look from other companies, consumers and media outlets.

Why some publicity stunts fail

Unfortunately, not all publicity stunts make the big time. Some are huge flops... such as when LifeLock's CEO assured the public that the company was so safe that he felt comfortable [giving out his social security number](#) to the world. To no one's surprise, hackers grabbed the number and hijacked his account.

Not only was he in the doghouse with the public, but his company was fined several million dollars by the FCC because they claimed LifeLock's publicity stunt style advertising amounted to deceptive advertising.

Of course, LifeLock isn't alone in the Publicity Stunt Hall of Shame. Many others have failed, too. The reason behind the failures is usually a combination of several problems:

- The company forgot its target audience.
- The publicity stunt touched upon too many deep-seated, negative emotions.
- The stunt and the product/service were not adeptly connected.
- The business didn't have a plan in place to convert sales after the publicity stunt was initiated.

With those factors in mind, it's up to an organisation that wishes to attempt a publicity stunt to clearly dot every 'i' and cross every 't'. After all, when a publicity stunt goes right, it can launch even a startup into the stratosphere.

Publicity stunts that wowed the world

The following are some of the publicity stunts that - no hyperbole here - literally wowed, nationally or even internationally. By examining why the stunts were successful, you can get a better picture of what you need to do to pull off a stunt worthy of a top ten list.

1. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

What does a bucket of ice poured over someone's head have to do with ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease? Nothing... until it's turned into a meme that runs wild on social media. What began as a simple challenge suddenly turned into a funny game that could be played by just about anybody from sports pros to superstars to little kids - supervised, of course.

The reasons for the Ice Bucket Challenge's impressive results - people around the world donated in excess of \$115m towards [ALS research](#) - include:

- It contained humour. Who doesn't love to see someone getting buckets of ice water poured on their heads?
- It raised awareness. Everyone who sloshed themselves with ice water urged others to donate to ALS. If they didn't know what ALS was, it gave them the chance to find out.
- It was easy to do. All you needed was a bucket, water, ice and a camera. Done.

2. Amazon drones package delivery

The topic of drones was on many individuals' lips by late 2014 and early 2015. While drones were seen as harbingers of Big Brother Is Watching You, they were also viewed with more than a modicum of curiosity. For instance, could they be used for some practical purposes?

Amazon took advantage of worldwide interest in drones by suggesting that the company would start to [use drones](#) as a method of dropping off packages. This promised to make people think about the 'what ifs' in terms of drone possibilities.

This publicity stunt positioned both Amazon and drones in a positive light, one where Amazon was seen as innovative and drones were seen as useful. Who knows? Maybe the future really will bring Amazon products to your business via a drone fleet.

3. Burger King and the Left-Handed Whopper

Humour sells... and the [Burger King Left-Handed Whopper](#) publicity stunt of 1998 proved that even on 1 April, people can be swayed. Essentially, the fast-food eatery announced that it was offering a special burger specifically for left-handed eaters. Yes, it was silly... but it made a terrific splash, especially when everyone realised it was a joke.

Not only did it get Burger King in the media, but it cost very little to implement. That makes it a winner in publicity stunt circles.

4. Sea Monster Shocks Beachgoers

Missed the Virgin prank that surprised the sand out of unsuspecting beachgoers? In this stunt, [a sea monster](#) emerged from the shore in order to showcase Virgin Media. It was a little outlandish, but who could resist watching the reactions of onlookers?

This one wins for sheer absurdity and viral opportunities.

What publicity stunt could your business create?

The best aspect of publicity stunts is that there are no barriers. If you come up with a stunt and make it happen, you can see where it takes your business. Spend time on the upfront planning, and ask what could potentially go awry, just in case. That way, you won't leave too much to chance when you launch.

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