



## BUSINESS

# Avoiding bad marketing situations and how to handle them in the moment

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EXCELLENT ☐  
GOOD ☐  
AVERAGE ☐  
POOR ☐  
The Worst!! ☒



They say any publicity is good publicity, but that may only happen if your [landscaping business](#) knows how to handle bad press and make the best of it.

Recently, a lawn care company in Richardson, Texas, placed a sign in the yard of one of its customer's neighbors. The neighbor, Robert Stricker, posted a photo on [Reddit](#) of the sign and said he felt the company was trying to shame him for his lawn quality.

The sign itself said, "Your lawn was not treated today, your neighbor's was." It encouraged people to call a 1-800 number for Dr. Green.

While Stricker is aware of his lawn's ugly duckling status, he didn't appreciate a lawn care company pointing it out.

"I thought, what's so bad about my lawn?" Stricker told [WFAA 8 ABC](#). "It's not the prettiest, but it felt like they were trying to shame me. Kind of like, look how much nicer your neighbor's lawn looks now."

The post of the sign on Reddit soon attracted enough attention, causing it to go viral with varying responses to the sign and suggestions on how Stricker should retaliate.

The post drew so much attention that even Dr. Green's owner, Ryan Van Hasstrecht saw the post.

"I thought the posts were actually quite funny, to be honest," Van Haastreht told the [Washington Post](#). "What's amazing about this story and how viral it's gone is we were literally only doing this for about two days."

The new marketing gimmick was for Dr. Green's crews to place the signs in the yards of all the neighbors, not just those that looked uncared for.

"We weren't trying to shame anybody," Van Haastreht explained to the Washington Post. "Just trying to do something a little bit creative...Certainly, I'm not thinking this was a great idea, necessarily."

Ironically, after Dr. Green ended its short-lived marketing campaign, business increased.

Stricker says he had no desire to harm the company, he simply wanted to shame the company as he felt it shamed him. He does say the sign made him more conscious of his lawn care habits.

“You kind of think of the internet as yelling into the wind,” Stricker told WFAA. “You do it sometimes and nothing really ever comes of it. Definitely never expected any actual change in policy or anything like that.”

While this example of a marketing tactic gone wrong simply resulted in some general embarrassment for all those involved, others are not so lucky.

**Marketing** is a tricky business, as you are trying to attract your customers’ attention, but you want to be portrayed in a positive light, and if things aren’t thought through, it can end in a PR nightmare.

Some of the questions you need to ask before launching any marketing campaign for your company include:

- Will our company be proud of this campaign?
- How will our customers respond to this campaign?
- How will people who have never heard about us perceive this campaign?
- Does this accurately represent our business?

Because you are always trying to reach a certain audience with your marketing efforts, be mindful of how they will interpret your campaign. If homeowners in an area see **lawn care** as a chore to do as little as possible, shaming them for not spending more time or money on their lawn can make them resentful towards your company.

A better tactic would be to appeal to removing a stressor from them by providing worry-free lawn care service. Talking to your customers can also help you understand their thoughts, feelings and beliefs, which will enable you to speak more toward their goals.

Ask for feedback from members of your company and loyal customers to see how they respond to the marketing idea. Sometimes outsiders can spot a sensitive subject you may have completely overlooked.

If you do decide to go with an idea that pushes the envelope or could end up being misinterpreted, be prepared to respond to the worst, as you cannot control others responding to your brand negatively.

A good rule of thumb if you do find your company under attack, deserved or not, is don’t feed the trolls. Some people on the internet may be criticizing your marketing attempt because it truly was in bad taste, but other like to make matters worse for the fun of it. These people are known as trolls.

While the initial backlash is going on, sometimes it is better to stay silent and listen to what the public has to say so you can learn from this mistake and make an acceptable public statement. You don't want to fire off an angry comment in the heat of the moment, but you don't want to not address the issue at all or you will come off completely indifferent.

Hopefully, you will be fortunate enough to never have a negative PR situation, but if it does occur, have a contingency plan in place and keep calm. These issues are rarely pleasant but they're not business-killers either, unless you let it get out of hand.