The danger of letting junior staff handle your communications

Holiday marketing goes wrong

This past weekend, I got an email from retailer Eddie Bauer with the subject line “Happy Memorial Day.” Now, last time I checked, Memorial Day is a holiday that commemorates and honors soldiers who have died in battle. It’s a solemn day, meant for reflection, gratitude, and mourning. It is not meant to be a happy occasion.

And Eddie Bauer was hardly alone. Grammarly, purportedly a website/app about proper word usage, also wished its readers a “happy Memorial Day.” And Walgreens, the drugstore, had a TV commercial that wished viewers a happy Memorial Day and sent regards and gratitude to the troops. Again, Memorial Day is not about those currently serving, it is about those who died while serving.

Ivanka Trump’s company got a bit of negative publicity because it tweeted how to make champagne popsicles to “celebrate” Memorial Day. You do not celebrate Memorial Day, you observe it.

These are mistakes and missteps that come from *assuming* you know something rather than actually knowing it.

These sad examples of holiday marketing show a deep lack of knowledge and understanding. They are mistakes that seem to come from people who have little breadth and depth. That’s what I mean by junior staff. Junior staff members are not necessarily young, but they are inexperienced, have little knowledge, don’t always understand context, and may make poorly thought out decisions. Junior staff may be aces at the

tactics, like posting to social media, but they aren't versed on strategy and communications goals.

When grownups handle communications

Over the Memorial Day weekend, Budweiser was running a promotion in which a portion of beer sales proceeds would be given to Folds of Honor, a charity that provides educational scholarships to families of fallen service members. In all aspects, this is a smarter and much more appropriate marketing tactic than the Memorial Day greetings listed above. It shows an understanding of the meaning of the holiday, and does something to give back (and thus, honors). Budweiser gets that people like to have cookouts and drink beer over the long holiday weekend, so it is taking advantage of a behavior and making it be worthwhile both for the bottom line and for what the holiday stands for.

Understand what it means and how it's best acknowledged

Holidays make easy marketing markers. Every store in this country uses the different holidays to sell something. If it's Fourth of July, get your flag themed whatever (t-shirts, cakes). If it's Thanksgiving buy some Pilgrim/turkey themed stuff. There are pastel colors and rabbits to celebrate Easter.

Yet, not all holidays are the same. Some are religious, some are patriotic, some are celebratory and some are solemn. Understanding what the meaning of a holiday is, and how people celebrate or commemorate it, goes a long way in ensuring that you won't be making a junior-level, major marketing mistake.

Did you notice any Memorial Day marketing missteps? How do you feel about using a solemn holiday like Memorial Day for marketing purposes? Let me know in the comments.